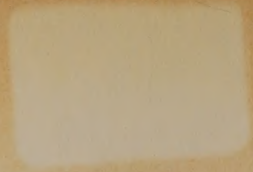


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A BIG GOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



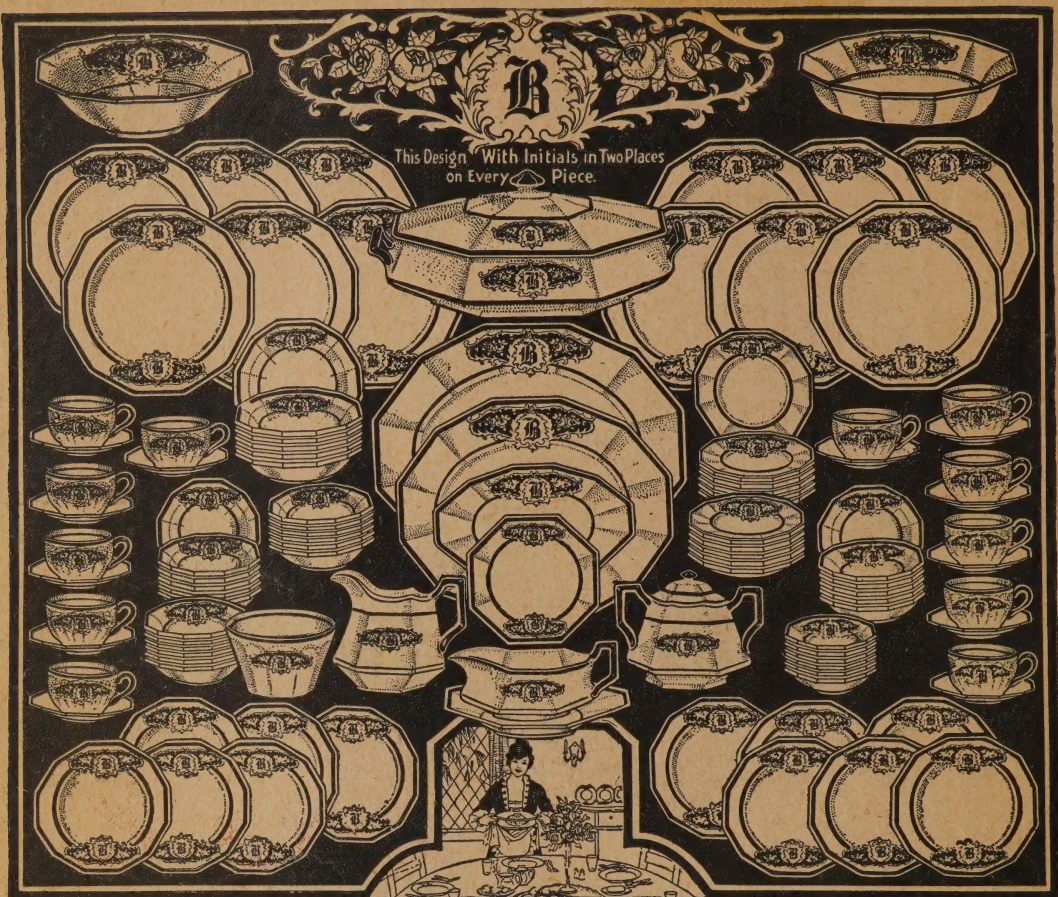
Max Brand's
Masterpiece

The Garden of Eden

10¢ PER
COPY

APRIL 15

BY THE \$4.00
YEAR



This Superb 110-piece Set, with initial in 2 places in wreath with 6-color decorations on every piece and gold covered handles, consists of:
 12 Dinner Plates, 9 inches
 12 Breakfast Plates, 7 inches
 12 Cups
 12 Saucers

12 Soup Plates, 7 1/2 inches
 12 Cereal Dishes, 6 inches
 12 Fruit Dishes, 5 1/4 inches
 12 Individual Bread and Butter Plates, 6 1/4 inches
 1 Platter, 13 1/2 inches

1 Platter, 11 1/2 inches
 1 Celery Dish, 8 1/4 inches
 1 Sauce Boat Tray, 7 1/4 inches
 1 Butter Plate, 6 inches
 1 Vegetable Dish, 10 1/2 inches, with lid (2 pieces)

1 Deep Bowl, 8 1/4 inches
 1 Oval Baker, 9 inches
 1 Small Deep Bowl, 5 inches
 1 Gravy Boat, 7 1/4 inches
 1 Creamer
 1 Sugar Bowl with cover (2 pieces)

Brings 110-Piece Gold Decorated Martha Washington Dinner Set

Send only \$1 and we ship the full set—110 pieces. Use it 30 days. Then if not satisfied, return them and we refund your \$1 and pay transportation charges both ways. If you keep them, take nearly a year to pay on easy terms.

Your Initial in 2 Places on Every Piece—5-Color Floral Decorations and Gold

Wonderful artistic effect is given by the wreath and rich design surrounding the initial. Your initial appears in 2 places on every piece.

All Handles Covered with Gold
 Every handle is covered with polished gold. Shipping weight about 90 lbs.

Important!

Hartman guarantees that every piece in this set is absolutely first quality—no seconds. This is a standard or "open" pattern. Replacement pieces may be had of us for three years. Each piece wrapped in tissue paper. Excellent packing to prevent breakage. Shipped without delay.

Order No. 324DMA13. Bargain price, \$32.85. Pay \$1 now, \$3 monthly.

HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.

Dept. 4133 Copyright, 1922, by Hartman's, Chicago, Ill.

FREE
 Bargain Catalog

368 pages of bargains in furniture, rugs, stoves, silverware, washing machines, kitchen ware, gas engines and cream separators, etc.—all on our easy terms—30 days' FREE trial. Post card or letter brings it FREE.

"Let Hartman Feather Your Nest!"

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.
 CHICAGO, ILL.

I enclose \$1.00. Send 110-piece Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set No. 324DMA13. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my \$1.00 and pay transportation charges both ways. If I keep it I will pay \$3.00 per month until full price, \$32.85, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

Name.....
 Street Address.....
 R. F. D. Box No.
 Town..... State.....
 State your Occupation..... Color.....
 Give Initial Wanted (Any One Letter).....



ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

This Letter Saved Me Half on a New Typewriter

Chicago, Nov. 2, 1921.

Dear Henry:

I hear that you are down in New York to open a branch office for your firm. You'll be buying a lot of things for the office, not the least important of which will be typewriters.

And that's what I want to talk to you about—typewriters. I want to give you the benefit of an experience I had some time ago, and thereby, I hope, save you some real money.

About a year ago I decided to buy a typewriter for home use. My first thought was to purchase one of the makes we were using in the office, which had been put in before I became buyer for the house. But when it came to digging up a hundred dollars for the machine—I just couldn't. Somehow or other it looked like too much money to me.

Then I thought about picking up a second-hand machine, but the price was about as high, and I had no assurance of service.

I was undecided as to what to do, when one evening at home I ran across an Oliver Typewriter ad in a magazine. I remembered then having read the advertising before and being impressed with the story.

"Why pay \$100 for Any Typewriter"—"When You Can Buy a New Oliver for \$49.50?" read the ad—then it went on to explain how The Oliver Typewriter Company had cut the price by selling direct and eliminating costly selling methods. It was clear to me as an experienced buyer how they could well afford to lop off \$50.50 of the \$100 by their new economical selling plan.

The ad brought out the fact, too, that I could pay \$49.50 cash, or \$55 in easy installments—\$3 after trial and then \$4 per month.

But the thing that decided me was their free trial offer. Without my sending or depositing a penny, they would ship me an Oliver for five days free trial. I could use the typewriter for five days just as if it were my own, and if I wasn't satisfied, all I had to do was to ship it back at the Oliver Company's expense. Well, I mailed in the coupon and got an Oliver for free trial. To make a short story shorter, I was more than pleased with the Oliver. I fully agreed with The Oliver Typewriter Company that if any typewriter was worth \$100 it was this splendid Oliver.

A Finer Typewriter at a Fair Price
Over 900,000 Sold

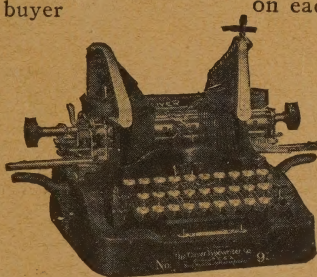
Well, later when we found it necessary to replace some of the typewriters at the office, you may be sure I put in Olivers, saving the company a nice \$50.50 on each. At first the girls were reluctant about changing machines, but after a week or two with the Oliver, they wouldn't have any other.

Naturally now we are all Oliver enthusiasts—that's why I write this letter to you.

You just give the Oliver a trial and you'll be more than willing to buy me a good dinner when I arrive in New York next month.

Yours, J. B.

**FREE
TRIAL**



**Now
\$49.50**

That is the letter that saved me \$50.50 on each of my typewriters. I not only equipped the office with the Oliver, but, like my friend, I also bought one for home use. Yes, I am more than willing to buy my friend a good dinner for his valuable advice.

Any reader may order an Oliver direct from this ad by mailing the coupon. No money in advance. No deposit. No obligation to buy. Return or keep the Oliver as you decide after five days free trial. If you decide to keep the typewriter, you can pay cash or you may take over a year to pay at the easy rate of \$4 a month. Mail the coupon today—NOW.

Canadian Price, \$79

The OLIVER
Typewriter Company

374 Oliver Typewriter Bldg.
Chicago, Ill.

**Save
\$50.50**

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY,
374 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay \$55 as follows: \$3 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of \$4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you \$49.50. If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is
☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name.....

Street Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation or Business.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLII

CONTENTS FOR APRIL 15, 1922

NUMBER 1

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JIMMY MILLION was a bug-hunter from Arkansas, seeking the destructive cotton boll weevil in Algiers, when he audaciously looked upon the unveiled face of a Moorish girl. That isn't done over there, and from that moment the hero of

EAST IS EAST

BY T. S. STRIBLING

which starts Next Week, had very little time for his beloved bugs. Romance called and Adventure beckoned, dragging Jimmy over the Sahara in pursuit of a girl who always did the unexpected. Don't miss this charming romance.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

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Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1922

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

SIX-ROOM HOUSE FREE!



ARGOSY READERS Stop Paying Rent Now!

Just imagine now for a moment that one of these beautiful six-room Sunshine Homes was yours, located right in your own town or on your own farm, a neat picket fence around it, flowers growing in well-arranged beds, rose bushes climbing the lattice at the porch ends, sending their fragrance into your nice, cool bedrooms. Picture this in your mind and then you will have a picture of what I want to do for you. This offer is so liberal it is hard to believe, but it is true—every word is true. You can get one of these homes FREE if you will rush your name and address on coupon below and do as I say.

I Will Even Buy a Lot for You!

Perhaps you do not own a lot—don't allow this to prevent your sending in your name and address. I'll take care of everything. I'll arrange to buy a lot for you in your own town and you can arrange to have the house built on the lot. Buy the lot in your neighborhood, or in a suitable neighborhood, allowing you to select the site—you will be proud of this home. I will be proud of it, for it will be a monument of advertising for my business. That is where I get my reward and that is why I make this most marvelous of offers—for the advertising it will give my business.

Free Yourself from the Landlord's Clutches

Surely you have longed for the day to come when you could cease paying rent to a landlord and call your home your own. It does not matter to me whether you already own a home, send your name in anyway. You could rent it to some good family and have a certain income—an independent income, or perhaps after it is built, you would like it so well you would move into it and rent out your old home.

Costs Nothing to Investigate

You risk nothing. You are under no obligations when you send me your name and address. All you need do is to rush me the coupon below now. Do it at once before you lay this magazine aside.

When I Say Free I Mean Free

This is perhaps the most liberal offer ever appearing in this magazine. I mean every word I say. Be prompt. Rush your name and address quick.

Act Quick!

C. E. MOORE, President,
Home Builders Club, Dept. 504, Batavia, Illinois.

Please send me, absolutely free, full particulars and plans and colored picture of the 6-Room House you will give away. I risk nothing.

Name.....

Town.....

Street.....

State.....



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest, needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	LINE RATE	Combination line rate
Munsey's Magazine . . .	\$1.50	\$4.00
Argosy-Allstory . . .	2.50	less 2 per cent cash discount.
Weekly . . .		
Minimum space four lines.		

May 20th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close April 22nd.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

DELICIOUS DRINKS in powder. Just add cold water and sugar. Orangeade, Cherry-Julep, etc. Fine for Home, Picnics, Dances, Entertainments, etc. **AGENTS WANTED.** 85c Clear profit on each dollar selling by the glass. Send time for 10 glass pkg., best drink you ever tasted, and partic. postpaid. 7 kinds 50c. **MORRISSEY CO.,** 4417-30 Madison St., Chicago.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. **Lacassian Co.,** Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—EASY, QUICK SALES.—\$60 to \$100 weekly. Valuable free premium to every customer. You write orders. We deliver and collect. Commissions daily. No capital or experience. Wonderful new solid aluminum handle big cutlery set, sells itself. Best year round proposition. Sample outfit free. Also: free Ford car offer. **NEW ERA MFG. CO.,** 803 Madison St., Dept. 20, Chicago.

WE PAY \$50 A WEEK TAKING ORDERS FOR INSIDE TYRES inner armor for automobile tires. Guaranteed to give double tire mileage. Any tire. Prevents punctures and blow-outs. Big demand. Low priced. Write quick for territory. **AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO.,** B301, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. **Ho-Bo-Co,** 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS, \$60 TO \$200 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. **Metallic Letter Co.,** 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS—Wonderful new aluminum roaster and combination cooker. Remarkable fast sales. Big profits. New credit plan. Unlimited business with no capital required. **WILSON UTENSIL COMPANY,** 504 East Third, Dayton, Ohio.

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. \$100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. **HOLMES RUBBER CO.,** 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

Sales Agents, Men or Women. \$200 a month. Year round position. No layoffs. Take orders for Jennings New Style Hosiery. Written guarantee of satisfaction or new hose free. Write for outfit. **Jennings Mfg. Co.,** Dept. 209, Dayton, Ohio.

LIVE AGENTS MAKE \$10 DAY SELLING EUREKA STRAINER and Splash Preventer for every water faucet. Takes on sight. Widely advertised and known. Get details today. **A. D. Seed Filter Company,** 73 Franklin, New York.

AGENTS WANTED to advertise our goods and distribute Free Samples to consumer. 90c per hour. Write for full particulars. **AMERICAN PRODUCTS COMPANY,** 5740 American Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

SALES REPRESENTATIVE WANTED every county to give all or spare time. Position worth \$1200 to \$3000 yearly. No previous experience or capital necessary. Write for full particulars. **A. E. SILVER-CHAMBERLIN COMPANY,** Clayton, N. J.

BOOKS

ANY BOOK YOU WANT AT CUT-RATE PRICES. Don't buy until you see our bargain list. Send postal for free copy. Write now. **MID-WEST BOOK HOUSE,** 58 West Washington Street, Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

Good Farm Lands. Near hustling city in Michigan. 20, 40, 80 acre tracts \$15 to \$35 per acre. Terms to meet your circumstances. Write today for FREE booklet, giving full information. **SWIGART LAND CO.,** Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. **Producers League,** 388 Walnwright, St. Louis, Mo.

GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel choruses, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogues, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stagehandbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. **T. S. Denison & Co.,** 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—\$75.00 to \$150.00 weekly. Our Big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. **A. R. Aldridge, Sales-Manager,** Lock Box 433, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book. **FREE. E. PALMER,** 500 Wooster, Ohio.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. **Harper Brush Works,** Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

Responsible firm offers big opportunity; wonderful invention; plumbing unnecessary; thousands enthusiastic users; representatives wanted; exclusive territory; experience unnecessary; free sales help. Write today. ROBINSON HOUSEHOLD MFG. CO., Dept. A-1, Factories Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Business patterns. Big values. Free samples. **Madison Mills,** 503 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS—150% PROFIT Handling Household, store and office necessity; repeater; free sample and exclusive territory to producers. **CHOO DE PRODUCTS,** 206-C Fullerton Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

\$1.95 FOR MADE-TO-ORDER PANTS—Special 30-day offer to prove our marvelous values in made-to-measure tailoring. **Agents Wanted.** Earn \$30 to \$35 Extra Every Week, taking orders for our high-class, made-to-measure clothes. No experience necessary. Write for samples today. **THE PROGRESS TAILORING CO.,** Dept. D-104, Chicago.

Inventor Startles Motorists; mechanical marvel prevents blurred windshields; one swipe keeps entire windshield clear 24 hours; railways same; sells \$1; fits pocket; year's guarantee; Clarke sold 61 two hours. **Security Mfg. Co.,** Dept. 612, Toledo, Ohio.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. **Acme Letter Co.,** 2500 F Congress, Chicago.

AGENTS—"VARNI-LAC" is the most wonderful seller. Puts a whole new coat on an old automobile for \$2.00. Exclusive territory. Send 8c cents for \$2.00 can. **REPUBLIC PRODUCTS COMPANY,** Prospect Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our 'New System Specialty Candy Factories' anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS A Brand New Hosiery Proposition for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and finest silk hose. You can sell at less than store prices. Write for samples. **THOMAS MANUFACTURING COMPANY,** Class 607, Dayton, Ohio.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

AMBITIOUS WRITERS, send today for Free copy, America's leading magazine for writers of photoplays, stories, poems, songs. Instructive, helpful. **WRITER'S DIGEST,** 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address **Authors' Press,** Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write **Literary Bureau,** 110, Hannibal, Mo.

Fifty stories wanted. Best one submitted published and \$50 paid author. Advantages for others. Small entry fee covers ALL. Send no Mss.; get details. **McKAY,** 634BR2, Santa Cruz, California.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. **Automobile Digest,** 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

New Discovery Explains Why Hair Turns Gray

Science Shows How Any Man or Woman Can Now Quickly Restore Hair to Its Own Original Color.

GRAY hair is simply hair without color! Science has discovered that if a certain natural process in the root were not affected by worry or by advancing age, the hair would never become gray, but retain its natural color throughout life.

A remarkable new discovery now makes it possible for the original color of the hair to be restored quickly and easily through a simple, natural process. Hair acquires its color (blond, black, brown, auburn, etc.) from the presence of coloring matter or pigment in tiny cells found at the root of the hair. This coloring matter is given off at the tip of the papilla, enters the root, and is dissolved in tiny corpuscles in the middle layer of the hair. The process is known as pigmentation.

Gray Hair Not Always a Sign of Age

Gray hair is simply due to the absence or loss of pigment in the cells. That explains why one woman may be gray at thirty while another retains the lustrous color of her hair until extreme old age.

As long as the process of pigmentation continues, the hair remains black or brown or whatever the original color happened to be. But as soon as this process is affected by advancing age, or by shock, worry or illness, the pigment supply lessens or fails—and no coloring is sent up into the hair. The result is that the hair becomes streaked with gray. This gray does not indicate a change in color. It indicates an absence of color, and unless this condition is corrected, the hair will soon become entirely gray.

The Only Way Color Can Be Restored

There is only one way to restore hair to its natural color—and that is by stimu-

lating the cells of pigmentation so that they function properly and supply the hair with natural coloring matter.

The ordinary hair "restorer" is a dye or tint that merely colors the gray hair artificially. It makes the hair coarse and brittle and the artificial color gradually wears away. But Tru-Tone, the wonderful new scientific discovery, actually restores the true color of the hair by strengthening and nourishing the pigment cells so that they once more function normally and supply the hair with natural coloring matter.



Wonderful for Thin, Falling Hair

It was only after countless laboratory tests that Tru-Tone was discovered. It is not a dye, or a stain, or a bleach. It is a pure, delicately scented powder that you dissolve in water. It is positively harmless and will not injure the most delicate hair. In fact, Tru-Tone will make your hair glossy, thick and beautiful at the same time that it restores it to its natural color.

Guarantee Backed By Million Dollar Bank

Our guarantee of Tru-Tone's harmless purity and sure satisfaction to users is backed by a million dollar bank, which insures the return to any purchaser of the total amount paid for Tru-Tone if its results are in any way unsatisfactory.

Special Free-Proof Offer

If you will fill in the coupon and mail it to us at once, we will send you a full-size package of Tru-Tone. Do not send any money. Just pay the postman \$1.45 (plus postage) in full payment when your Tru-Tone arrives. This is a special introductory price—Tru-Tone ordinarily sells for \$3.00. You may send money with your order if you wish. If, after a fair test, you are not delighted with results, if Tru-Tone does not restore your hair to its original color, simply return what is left of it and your money will be refunded at once.

Hair Course FREE

In your package of Tru-Tone we will include entirely free our valuable 4-booklet course called "Hair Culture." It reveals many interesting and important secrets regarding the hair and scalp. Don't fail to get a free set—and be sure to take advantage of the other special introductory offers. Mail this coupon NOW. Domino House, Dept. T-434, 269 South 9th Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

DOMINO HOUSE, Dept. T-434, 269 South 9th Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

You may send me a \$3.00 carton of your Tru-Tone. I will pay the postman \$1.45 plus postage. I understand that you will include entirely free, your 4-booklet course, "Hair Culture." Although I am benefiting by the special introductory cut price, I am nevertheless purchasing the first package with the absolute guaranteed privilege of returning it after a fair trial, and you agree to refund my money if I am not delighted with the results in every way. I will return the course if I return Tru-Tone. I am to be the sole and only judge.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

If apt to be out when postman calls send remittance with this coupon.

ASPIRIN

Name "Bayer" on Genuine



Warning! Unless you see the name "Bayer" on package or on tablets you are not getting genuine Aspirin prescribed by physicians for twenty-one years and proved safe by millions. Take Aspirin only as told in the Bayer package for Colds, Headache, Neuralgia, Rheumatism, Earache, Toothache, Lumbago and for Pain. Handy tin boxes of twelve Bayer Tablets of Aspirin cost few cents. Drug-gists also sell larger packages. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Mono-aceticacidester of Salicylicacid.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

EXECUTIVES WANTED—Employers in Almost Every Line are looking for men of ability to place in responsible positions. Our modern, effective, confidential service is guaranteed to put you in touch with such employers. Send name for details. The Cleveland Vocational Bureau, 426 Bulkley Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

RAILWAY, MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T. payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

MAKE MONEY AT HOME. You can earn from \$1 to \$2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel: make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. BE A DETECTIVE. Great demand everywhere. Excellent opportunities for travel. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1963 Broadway, New York.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! \$110 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

ALL MEN—WOMEN OVER 17, willing to accept Government Positions \$135 (Traveling or Stationary) write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

RAG JAZZ PIANO OR SAXOPHONE taught in 20 lessons. "Christensen" schools in most cities. See your phone book, or write for booklet about mail course. Teachers wanted in unoccupied cities. Christensen School 441, 20 E. Jackson, Chicago.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED. A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., N. Y.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We will compose the music, secure copyright, and print. Submit poems on any subject. Seton Music Company, 920 S. Michigan Ave., Room 190, Chicago.

SONG WRITERS—If you have song poems or melodies write me immediately. I have absolutely the very best proposition to offer you. Act now and be convinced. RAY HIBBELER, D-147, 4040 Dickens Ave., Chicago.

Write the Words for a Song. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on a royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Composing Studios, 238-B Fitzgerald Building, New York.

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The Garden of Eden



Part I

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Trillin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LUKIN WILL NOT BEND THE KNEE.

BY careful tailoring the broad shoulders of Ben Connor were made to appear fashionably slender, and he disguised the depth of his chest by a stoop whose model slouched along Broadway somewhere between sunset and dawn. He wore, moreover, the first or second pair of spats that had ever stepped off the train at Lukin Junction, a glowing Scotch tweed, and a Panama hat of the color and weave of fine old linen. There was a skeleton at this Feast of Fashion, however, for only tight gloves could make the stubby fingers and broad palms of Connor presentable. At ninety-five in the shade gloves were out of the question, so he held a pair of yellow chamois in one hand and in the other an amber-headed cane. This was the end of the little spur-line, and while the train backed off down the track, staggering across the switch, Ben Connor looked after it, leaning upon his cane just forcibly

enough to feel the flexion of the wood. This was one of his attitudes of elegance, and when the train was out of sight, and only the puffs of white vapor rolled around the shoulder of the hill, he turned to look the town over, having already given Lukin Junction ample time to look over Ben Connor.

The little crowd was not through with its survey, but the eye of the imposing stranger abashed it. He had one of those long somber faces which Scotchmen call "dour." The complexion was sallow, heavy pouches of sleeplessness lay beneath his eyes, and there were ridges beside the corners of his mouth which came from an habitual compression of the lips. Looked at in profile he seemed to be smiling broadly so that the gravity of the full face was always surprising. It was this that made the townsfolk look down. After a moment, they glanced back at him hastily. Somewhere about the corners of his lips or his eyes there was a glint of interest, a touch of amusement—they could not tell which,

but from that moment they were willing to forget the clothes and look at the man.

While Ben Connor was still enjoying the situation, a rotund fellow bore down on him.

"You're Mr. Connor, ain't you? You wired for a room in the hotel? Come on, then. My rig is over here. These your grips?"

He picked up the suit case and the soft leather traveling bag, and led the way to a buckboard at which stood two downheaded ponies.

"Can't we walk?" suggested Ben Connor, looking up and down the street at the dozen sprawling frame houses; but the fat man stared at him with calm pity. He was so fat and so good-natured that even Ben Connor did not impress him greatly.

"Maybe you think this is Lukin?" he asked.

When the other raised his heavy black eyebrows he explained: "This ain't nothing but Lukin Junction. Lukin is clear round the hill. Climb in, Mr. Connor."

Connor laid one hand on the back of the seat, and with surge of his strong shoulders leaped easily into his place; the fat man noted this with a roll of his little eyes, and then took his own place, the old wagon careening toward him as he mounted the step. He sat with his right foot dangling over the side of the buckboard, and a plump shoulder turned fairly upon his passenger so that when he spoke he had to throw his head and jerk out the words; but this was apparently his time-honored position in the wagon, and he did not care to vary it for the sake of conversation. A flap of the loose reins set the horses jogg-trotting out of Lukin Junction down a gulch which aimed at the side of an enormous mountain, naked, with no sign of a village or even a single shack among its rocks. Other peaks crowded close on the right and left, with a loftier range behind, running up to scattered summits white with snow and blue with distance. The shadows of the late afternoon were thick as fog in the gulch, and all the lower mountains were already dim so that the snow-peaks in the distance seemed as detached, and high as clouds. Ben Connor sat with his cane between his knees and his hands

draped over its amber head and watched those shining places until the fat man heaved his head over his shoulder.

"Most like somebody told you about Townsend's Hotel?"

His passenger moved his attention from the mountain to his companion. He was so leisurely about it that it seemed he had not heard.

"Yes," he said, "I was told of the place."

"Who?" said the other expectantly.

"A friend of mine."

The fat man grunted and worked his head around so far that a great wrinkle rolled up his neck close to his ear. He looked into the eye of the stranger.

"Me being Jack Townsend, I'm sort of interested to know things like that; the ones that like my place and them that don't."

Connor nodded, but since he showed no inclination to name his friend, Jack Townsend swung on a new tack to come to the windward of this uncommunicative guest. Lukin was a fairly inquisitive town, and the hotel proprietor usually contributed his due portion and more to the gossips.

"Some comes for one reason and some for another," went on Townsend, "which generally it's to hunt and fish. That ain't funny come to think of it, because outside of liars nobody ever hooked finer trout than what comes out of the Big Sandy. Some of 'em comes for the mining—they was a strike over to South Point last week—and some for the cows, but mostly it's the fishing and the hunting."

He paused, but having waited in vain he said directly: "I can show you the best holes in the Big Sandy."

There was another of those little waits with which, it seemed, the stranger met every remark; not a thoughtful pause, but rather as though he wondered if it were worth while to make any answer.

"I've come here for the silence," he said.

"Silence," repeated Townsend, nodding in the manner of one who does not understand.

Then he flipped the roan with the butt of his lines and squinted down the gulch, for he felt there might be a double meaning in

the last remark. Filled with the gloomy conviction that he was bringing a silent man to his hotel, he gloomily surveyed the mountain sides. There was nothing about them to cheer him. The trees were lost in shadows and all the slopes seemed quite barren of life. He vented a little burst of anger by yanking at the rein of the off horse, a dirty gray.

"Giddap, Kitty, damn your eyes!"

The mare jumped, struck a stone with a fore foot, and stumbled heavily. Townsend straightened her out again with an expert hand and cursed.

"Of all the no-good hosses I ever see," he said, inviting the stranger to share in his just wrath, "this Kitty is the outbeatingest, no good rascal. Git on, fool."

He clapped the reins along her back, and puffed his disgust.

"And yet she has points. Now, I ask you, did you ever see a truer Steeldust? Look at that high croup and that straight rump. Look at them hips, I say, and a chest to match 'em. But they ain't any heart in her. Take a hoss through and through," he went on oracularly, "they're pretty much like men, mostly, and if a man ain't got the heart inside, it don't make no difference how big around the chest he measures."

Ben Connor had leaned forward, studying the mare.

"Your horse would be all right in her place," he said. "Of course, she won't do up here in the mountains."

Like any true Westerner of the mountain-desert, Jack Townsend would far rather have been discovered with his hand in the pocket of another man than be observed registering surprise. He looked carefully ahead until his face was straight again. Then he turned.

"Where d'you make out her place to be?" he asked carelessly.

"Down below," said the other without hesitation, and he waved his arm. "Down in soft, sandy irrigation country she'd be a fine animal."

Jack Townsend blinked. "You know her?" he asked.

The other shook his head.

"Well, damn my soul!" breathed the

hotel proprietor. "This beats me. Maybe you read a hoss's mind, partner?"

Connor shrugged his shoulders, but Townsend no longer took offense at the taciturnity of his companion; he spoke now in a lower confiding voice which indicated an admission of equality.

"You're right. They said she was good, and she *was* good! I seen her run; I saddled her up and rode her thirty miles through sand that would of broke the heart of anything but a Steeldust, and she come through without battin' an eye. But when I got her up here she didn't do no good. But?"—he reverted suddenly to his original surprise—"how'd you know her? Recognize the brand, maybe?"

"By her trot," said the other, and he looked across the hills.

They had turned an angle of the gulch, and on a shelf of level ground, dishing out from the side of the mountain, stretched the town.

"Isn't it rather odd," said Connor, "for people to build a town over here when they could have it on the railroad?"

"Maybe it looks queer to some," nodded Townsend.

He closed his lips firmly, determined to imitate the terseness of his guest; but when he observed with a side-glance that Connor would not press the inquiry, talk suddenly overflowed. Indeed, Townsend was a running well of good nature, continually washing all bad temper over the brim.

"I'll show you how it was," he went on. "You see that shoulder of the mountain away off up there? If the light was clearer you'd be able to make out some old shacks up there, half standin' up and half fallin' down. That's where Lukin used to be. Well, the railroad come along and says: 'We're goin' to run a spur into the valley, here. You move down and build your town at the end of the track and we'll give you a hand bringing up new timber for the houses.' That's the way with railroads; they want to dictate; they're too used to handlin' folks back East that'll let capital walk right over their backs."

Here Townsend sent a glance at Connor to see if he stirred under the spur, but there was no sign of irritation.

"Out here we're different; nobody can't step in here and run us unless he's asked. See? We said, you build the railroad half way and we'll come the other half, but we won't come clear down into the valley."

"Why?" asked Connor. "Isn't Lukin Junction a good place for a village?"

"Fine. None better. But it's the principle of the thing, you see? Them railroad magnates says to us: 'Come all the way.' 'Go to the devil,' says we. And so we come half-way to the new railroad and built our town; it'd be a pile more agreeable to have Lukin over where the railroad ends—look at the way I have to drive back and forth for my trade? But just the same, we showed that railroad that it couldn't talk us down."

He struck his horses savagely with the lines; they sprang from the jog-trot into a canter, and the buckboard went bumping down the main street of Lukin.

CHAPTER II.

CONNOR HEARS A CALL.

BEN CONNOR sat in his room overlooking the crossing of the streets. It was by no means the ramshackle huddle of lean-to's that he had expected, for Lukin was built to withstand a siege of January snows and storm-winds which were scooped by the mountains into a funnel that focused straight on the village. Besides, Lukin was no accidental, cross-roads town, but the bank, store, and amusement center of a big country. The timber was being swept from the Black Mountain; there were fairly prosperous mines in the vicinity; and cattlemen were ranging their cows over the plateaus more and more during the spring and summer. Therefore, Lukin boasted two parallel main streets, and a cross street, looking forward to the day when it should be incorporated and have a mayor of its own. At present it had a moving-picture house and a dance hall where a hundred and fifty couples could take the floor at once; above all, it had Jack Townsend's hotel. This was a stout, timber building of two stories, the lower portion of which was occupied by

the restaurant, the drug store, the former saloon now transformed into an ice-cream parlor, and other public places.

It was dark, but the night winds had not yet commenced, and Lukin sweltered with a heat more unbearable than full moon.

It was nothing to Ben Connor, however, for he was fresh from the choking summer nights of Manhattan, and in Lukin, no matter how hot it became, the eye could always find a cool prospect. It had been unpleasant enough when the light was burning, for the room was done in a hot, orange-colored paper, but when he blew out the lamp and sat down before the window he forgot the room and let his glance go out among the mountains. A young moon drifted across the corner of his window, a sickle of light with a dim, phosphorescent line around the rest of the circle. It was bright enough to throw the peaks into strong relief, and dull enough to let the stars live.

His upward vision had as a rule been limited by the higher stories of some skyscraper, and now his eye wandered with a pleasant sense of freedom over the snow summits where he could imagine a cold wind blowing through reach after reach of the blue-gray sky. It pleased and troubled Ben Connor very much as one is pleased and troubled by the first study of a foreign language, with new prospects opening, strange turns of thought, and great unknown names like stars. But after a time Ben Connor relaxed. The first cool puff moved across his forehead and carried him halfway to a dreamless sleep.

Here a chorus of mirth burst up at him from the street; men's voices pitched high and wild, the almost hysterical laughter of people who are much alone. In Manhattan only drunken men laughed like this. Among the mountains it did not irritate Ben Connor; in tune with the rest, it was full of freedom. He looked down to the street, and seeing half a dozen bearded fellows frolic in the shaft of light from a window, he decided that people kept their youth longer in Lukin.

All things seemed in order to Connor, this night. He rolled his sleeves higher to

let all the air that stirred get at his bulky forearms, and then lighted a cigar. It was a dark, oily Havana—it had cost him a great deal in money and nerves to acquire that habit—and he breathed the scent deep while he waited for the steady wind which Jack Townsend had promised. There was just enough noise to give the silence that waiting quality which cannot be described; below him voices murmured, and lifted now and then, rhythmically. Ben Connor thought the sounds strangely musical, and he began to brim with the same good nature which puffed the cheeks of Jack Townsend. There was a substantial basis for that content in the broiled trout which he had had for dinner. It was while his thoughts drifted back to those browned fish that the first wind struck him. Dust with an acrid scent whirled up from the street—then a steady stream of air swept his face and arms.

It was almost as if another personality had stepped into the room. The sounds from the street fell away, and there was the rustling of cloth somewhere, the cool lifting of hair from his forehead, and an odd sense of motion—as if the wind were blowing through him. But something else came with the breeze, and though he noted it at first with only a subconscious discontent, it beat gradually into his mind, a light ticking, very rapid, and faint, and sounding in an irregular rhythm. He wanted to straighten out that rhythm and make the flutter of tapping regular. Then it began to take on a meaning; it framed words.

"Philip Lord, jailed for embezzlement."

"Hell!" burst out Ben Connor. "The telegraph!"

He started up from his chair, feeling betrayed, for that light, irregular tapping was the voice of the world from which he had fled. A hard, cool mind worked behind the gray eyes of Ben Connor, but as he fingered the cigar his brain was fumbling at a large idea. Forty-Second and Broadway was calling him back.

When he looked out the window, now, the mountains were flat shapes against a flat sky, with no more meaning than a picture.

The sounder was chattering: "Kid Lane

wins title in eighth round. Lucky punch dethrones lightweight champion." Ben Connor swallowed hard and found that his throat was dry. He was afraid of himself—afraid that he would go back. He was recalled from his ugly musing by the odor of the cigar, which had burned out and was filling the room with a rank smell; he tossed the crumbled remnants through the window, crushed his hat upon his head, and went down, collarless, coatless, to get on the street in the sound of men's voices. If he had been in Manhattan he would have called up a pal; they would have planned an evening together; but in Lukin—

At the door below he glared up and down the street. There was nothing to see but a light buggy which rolled noiselessly through the dust. A dog detached itself from behind the vehicle and came to bark furiously at his feet. The kicking muscles in Connor's leg began to twitch, but a voice shouted and the mongrel trotted away, growling a challenge over its shoulder. The silence fell once more. He turned and strode back to the desk of the hotel, behind which Jack Townsend sat tilted back in his chair reading a newspaper.

"What's doing in this town of yours to-night?" he asked.

The proprietor moistened a fat thumb to turn the page and looked over his glasses at Connor.

"Appears to me there ain't much stirrin' about," he said. "Except for the movies down the street. You see, everybody's there."

"Movies," muttered Connor under his breath, and looked savagely around him.

What his eyes fell on was a picture of an old, old man on the wall, and the rusted stove which stood in the center of the room with a pipe zigzagging uncertainly toward the ceiling. Everything was out of order, broken down—like himself.

"Looks to me like you're kind of off your feet," said Jack Townsend, and he laid down his paper and looked wistfully at his guest. He made up his mind. "If you're kind of dry for a drink," he said, "I might rustle you a flask of red-eye—"

"Whisky?" echoed Connor, and mois-

tened his lips. Then he shook his head. "Not that."

He went back to the door with steps so long and heavy that Jack Townsend rose from his chair, and spreading his hands on the desk, peered after the muscular figure.

"That gent is a bad hombre," pronounced Jack to himself. He sat down again with a sigh, and added: "Maybe."

At the door Connor was snarling: "Quiet? Sure; like a grave!"

The wind freshened, fell away, and the light, swift ticking sounded again more clearly. It mingled with the alkali scent of the dust—Manhattan and the desert together. He felt a sense of persecuted virtue. But one of his maxims was: "If anything bothers you, go and find out about it."

Ben Connor largely used maxims and epigrams; he met crises by remembering what some one else had said. The ticking of the sounder was making him homesick and dangerously nervous, so he went to find the telegrapher and see the sounder which brought the voice of the world into Lukin.

A few steps carried him to a screen door through which he looked upon a long, narrow office.

In a corner, an electric fan swung back and forth through a hurried arc and fluttered papers here and there. Its whining almost drowned the ticking of the sounder, and Ben Connor wondered with dull irritation how a tapping which was hardly audible at the door of the office could carry to his room in the hotel. He opened the door and entered.

CHAPTER III.

CONNOR TALKS SHOP.

IT was a room not more than eight feet wide, very long, with the floor, walls, and ceiling of the same narrow, unpainted pine boards; the flooring was worn ragged and the ceiling warped into waves. Across the room a wide plank with a trap-door at one end served as a counter, and now it was littered with yellow telegraph blanks, and others, crumpled up, were scat-

tered about Connor's feet. No sooner had the screen door squeaked behind him and shut him fairly into the place than the staccato rattling of the sounder multiplied, and seemed to chatter from the wall behind him. It left an echoing in the ear of Ben Connor which formed into the words of his resolution, "I've made my stake and I'm going to beat it. I'm going to get away where I can forget the worries. To-day I beat 'em. To-morrow the worries will beat me."

That was why he was in Lukin—to forget. And here the world had sneaked up on him and whispered in his ear. Was it fair?

It was a woman who "jerked lightning" for Lukin. With that small finger on the key she took the pulse of the world.

"Belmont returns—" chattered the sounder.

Connor instinctively covered his ears. Then, feeling that he was acting like a silly child, he lowered his hands.

Another idea had come to him that this was fate—luck—his luck. Why not take another chance?

He wavered a moment, fighting the temptation and gloomily studying the back of the operator. The cheapness of her white cotton dress fairly shouted at him. Also her hair straggled somewhat about the nape of her neck. All this irritated Connor absurdly.

"Fifth race," said the sounder: "Lady Beck, first; Conqueror, second—"

Certainly this was fate tempting tune.

Connor snatched a telegraph blank and scribbled a message to Harry Slocum, his betting commissioner during this unhappy vacation.

"Send dope on Murray handicaps time—trials of Trickster and Caledonian. Hotel Townsend."

This done, having tapped sharply on the counter to call the operator's attention, he dropped his elbows on the plank and scowled downward in profound reverie. They were pouring out of Belmont Park, now, many a grim face and many a joyous face. Money had come easy and gone easy. Ah, the reckless bonhomie of that crowd, living for to-day only, because "to-

morrow the ponies may have it!" A good day for the bookies if that old cripple, Lady Beck, had found her running legs. What a trimming they must have given the wise ones!

At this point another hand came into the circle of his vision and turned the telegram about. A pencil flicked across the words, checking them swiftly. Connor was fascinated by that hand, it was so cool, so slender and deft. He glanced up to her face and saw a resolute chin, a smiling mouth which was truly lovely, and direct eyes as dark as his own. She carried her head buoyantly, in a way that made Connor think, with a tingle, of some clean-blooded filly at the post.

The girl made his change, and shoving it across, she bent her head toward the sounder. The characters came through too swiftly for even Ben Connor's sharp ear, but the girl, listening, smiled slowly.

"Something about soft pine?" queried Connor.

She brightened at this unexpected meeting-point. Her eyes widened as she studied him and listened to the message at the same time, and she accomplished this double purpose with such calm that Connor felt a trifle abashed. Then the shadow of listening vanished, and she concentrated on Connor.

"Soft pine is up," she nodded. "I knew it would climb as soon as old Lucas bought in."

"Speculator in Lukin, is he?"

"No. California. The one whose yacht burned at Honolulu last year. Sold pine like wild fire two months ago; down goes the price. Then he bought a little while ago, and now the pine skyrockets. He can buy a new yacht with what he makes, I suppose!"

The shade of listening darkened her eyes again. "Listen!" She raised a hushing forefinger that seemed tremulous in rhythm with the ticking.

"Wide brims are in again," exclaimed the operator, "and wide hats are awful on me; isn't that the luck?"

She went back to her key with the message in her hand, and Connor, dropping his elbows on the counter, watched her send it,

with swift almost imperceptible flections of her wrist.

Then she sat again with her hands folded in her lap, listening. Connor turned his head and glanced through the door; by squinting he could look over the roof just across the street and see the shadowy mountains beyond; then he looked back again and watched the girl listening to the voice of the outer world. The shock of the contrast soothed. He began to forget about Ben Connor and think of her.

The girl turned in her chair and directly faced him, and he saw that she moved her whole body just as she moved her hand, swiftly, but without a jerk; she considered him gravely.

"Lonely?" she inquired. "Or worried?"

She spoke with such a commonplace intonation that one might have thought it her business to attend to loneliness and worries.

"As a matter of fact," answered Ben Connor, instinctively dodging the direct query, "I've been wondering how they happened to stick a number-one artist on this wire.

"I'm not kidding," he explained hastily. "You see, I used to jerk lightning myself."

For the first time she really smiled, and he discovered what a rare thing a smile may be. Up to that point he had thought she lacked something, just as the white dress lacked a touch of color.

"Oh," she nodded. "Been off the wire long?"

Ben Connor grinned. It began with his lips; last of all the dull gray eyes lighted.

"Ever since a hot day in July at Aqueduct. The Lorrimer Handicap on the 11th of July, to be exact. I tossed up my job the next day."

"I see," she said, becoming aware of him again. "You played Tip-Top Second."

"The deuce! Were you at Aqueduct that day?"

"I was here—on the wire." He restrained himself with an effort, for a series of questions was Connor's idea of a dull conversation. He merely rubbed his

knuckles against his chin and looked at her wistfully.

"He nipped King Charles and Miss Lazy at the wire and squeezed home by a nose—paid a fat price, I remember," went on the girl. "I suppose you had something down on him?"

"Did a friend of yours play that race?"

"Oh, no; but I was new to the wire, then, and I used to cut in and listen to everything that came by."

"I know. It's like having some one whisper secrets in your ear, at first, isn't it? But you remember the Lorrimer, eh? That was a race!"

The sounder stopped chattering, and by an alternation in her eyes he knew that up to that moment she had been giving two-thirds of her attention to the voice of the wire and the other fraction to him; but now she centered upon him, and he wanted to talk. As if, mysteriously, he could share some of the burden of his unrest with the girl. Most of all he wished to talk because this office had lifted him back to the old days of "lightning jerking," when he worked for a weekly pay-check. The same nervous eagerness which had been his in that time was now in this girl, and he responded to it like a call of blood to blood.

"A couple of wise ones took me out to Aqueduct that day; I had all that was coming to me for a month in my pocket, and I kept saying to myself: 'They think I'll fall for this game and drop my wad; here's where I fool 'em!'"

He chuckled as he remembered.

"Go on," said the girl. "You make me feel as if I were about to make a clean-up!"

"Really interested?"

She fixed an eager glance on him, as though she were judging how far she might let herself go. Suddenly she leaned closer to Connor.

"Interested? I've been taking the world off the wire for six years—and you've been where things happen."

"That's the way I felt at Aqueduct when I saw the ponies parade past the grand stand the first time," he nodded. "They came dancing on the bitt, and even I could see that they weren't made for use;

legs that never pulled a wagon, and backs that couldn't weight. Just toys; speed machines; all heart and fire and springy muscles. It made my pulse jump to the fever point to watch them light-foot it along the rail with the groom in front on a clod of a horse. I felt that I'd lived the way that horse walked—downheaded, and I decided to change."

He stopped short and locked his stubby fingers together, frowning at her so that the lines beside his mouth deepened.

"I seem to be telling you the story of my life," he said. Then he saw that she was studying him, not with idle curiosity, but rather as one turns the pages of an absorbing book, never knowing what the next moment will reveal or where the characters will be taken.

"You want to talk; I want to hear you," she said gravely. "Go ahead. Besides—I don't chatter afterward. They paraded past the grand stand, then what?"

Ben Connor sighed.

"I watched four races. The wise guys with me were betting ten bucks on every race and losing on red-hot tips; and every time I picked out the horse that looked good to me, that horse ran in the money. Then they came out for the Lorrimer. One of my friends was betting on King Charles and the other on Miss Lazy. Both of them couldn't win, and the chance was that neither of them would. So I looked over the line as it went by the stand. King Charles was a little chestnut, one of those long fellows that stretch like rubber when they commence running; Miss Lazy was a gangling bay. Yes, they were both good horses, but I looked over the rest, and pretty soon I saw a rangy chestnut with a white foreleg and a midget of a boy up in the saddle. 'No. 7—Tip-Top Second,' said the wise guy on my right when I asked him; 'a lame one.' Come to look at him again, he was doing a catch step with his front feet, but I had an idea that when he got going he'd forget all about that catch and run like the wind. Understand?"

"Just a hunch," said the girl. "Yes!"

She stepped closer to the counter and leaned across it. Her eyes were bright. Connor knew that she was seeing that pic-

ture of the hot day, the crowd of straw hats stirring wildly, the murmur and cry that went up as the string of racers jogged past.

"They went to the post," said Connor, "and I got down my bet—a hundred dollars, my whole wad—on Tip-Top Second. The bookie looked just once at me, and I'll never forget how his eyebrows went together. I went back to my seat."

"You were shaking all over, I guess," suggested the girl, and her hands were quivering.

"I was not," said Ben Connor, "I was cold through and through, and never moved my eyes off Tip-Top Second. His jockey had a green jacket with two stripes through it, and the green was easy to watch. I saw the crowd go off, and I saw Tip-Top left flat-footed at the post."

The girl drew a breath. Connor smiled at her. The hot evening had flushed his face, but now a small spot of white appeared in either cheek, and his dull eyes had grown expressionless. She knew what he meant when he said that he was cold when he saw the string go to the post.

"It—it must have made you sick!" said the girl.

"Not a bit. I knew the green jacket was going to finish ahead of the rest as well as I knew that my name was Ben Connor. I said he was left at the post. Well, it wasn't exactly that, but when the bunch came streaking out of the shoot, he was half a dozen lengths behind. It was a mile and an eighth race. They went down the back stretch, eight horses all bunched together, and the green jacket drifting that half dozen lengths to the rear. The wise guys turned and grinned at me; then they forgot all about me and began to yell for King Charles and Miss Lazy.

"The bunch were going around the turn and the two favorites were fighting it out together. But I had an eye for the green jacket, and halfway around the turn I saw him move up."

The girl sighed.

"No," Connor continues, "he hadn't won the race yet. And he never should have won it at all, but King Charles was carrying a hundred and thirty-eight

pounds, and Miss Lazy a hundred and thirty-three, while Tip-Top Second came in as a fly-weight eighty-seven pounds! No horse in the world could give that much to him when he was right, but who guessed that then?

"They swung around the turn and hit the stretch. Tip-Top took the curve like a cart horse. Then the bunch straightened out, with King Charles and Miss Lazy fighting each other in front and the rest streaking out behind like the tail of a flag. They did that first mile in 1.38, but they broke their hearts doing it, with that weight up.

"They had an eighth to go—one little measly furlong, with Tip-Top in the ruck, and the crowd screaming for King Charles and Miss Lazy; but just exactly at the mile post the leaders flattened. I didn't know it, but the man in front of me dropped his glasses and his head. 'Blown!' he said, and that was all. It seemed to me that the two in front were running as strongly as ever, but Tip-Top was running better. He came streaking, with the boy flattening out along his neck and the whip going up and down. But I didn't stir. I couldn't; my blood was turned to ice water.

"Tip-Top walked by the ruck and got his nose on the hip of King Charles. Somebody was yelling behind me in a squeaky voice: 'There is something wrong! There's something wrong!' There was, too, and it was the eighty-seven pounds that a fool handicapper had put on Tip-Top. At the sixteenth Miss Lazy threw up her head like a swimmer going down and dropped back, and Tip-Top was on the King's shoulder. Fifty yards to the finish; twenty-five—then the King staggered as if he'd been hit between the ears, and Tip-Top jumped out to win by a neck.

"There was one big breath of silence in the grand stand—then a groan. I turned my head and saw the two wise guys looking at me with sick grins. Afterward I collected two thousand bucks from a sicker looking bookie."

He paused and smiled at the girl.

"That was the 11th of July. First real day of my life."

She gathered her mind out of that scene.

"You stepped out of a telegraph office, with your finger on the key all day, every day, and you jumped into two thousand dollars?"

After she had stopped speaking her thoughts went on, written in her eyes.

"You'd like to try it, eh?" said Ben Connor.

"Haven't you had years of happiness out of it?"

He looked at her with a grimace.

"Happiness?" he echoed. "Happiness?"

She stepped back so that she put his deeply-marked face in a better light.

"You're a queer one for a winner."

"Sure, the turf is crowded with queer ones like me."

"Winners, all of 'em?"

His eye had been gradually brightening while he talked to her. He felt that the girl rang true, as men ring true, yet there was nothing masculine about her.

"You've heard racing called the sport of kings? That's because only kings can afford to follow the ponies. Kings and Wall Street. But a fellow can't squeeze in without capital. I've made a go of it for a while; pretty soon we all go smash. Sooner or later I'll do what everybody else does—put up my cash on a sure thing and see my money go up in smoke."

"Then why don't you pull out with what you have?"

"Why does the earth keep running around the sun? Because there's a pull. Once you've followed the ponies you'll keep on following 'em. No hope for it. Oh, I've seen the boys come up one after another, make their killings, hit a streak of bad luck, plunge, and then watch their sure-things throw up its tail in the stretch and fade into the ruck."

He was growing excited as he talked; he was beginning to realize that he must make his break from the turf now or never. And he spoke more to himself than to the girl.

"We all hang on. We play the game till it breaks us and still we stay with it. Here I am, two thousand miles away from the tracks—and sending for dope to make

a play! Can you beat that? Well, so-long."

He turned away gloomily.

"Good night, Mr. Connor."

He turned sharply.

"Where'd you get that name?" he asked with a trace of suspicion.

"Off the teelgram."

He nodded, but said: "I've an idea I've been chattering too much."

"My name is Ruth Manning," answered the girl. "I don't think you've said too much."

He kept his eyes steadily on her while he shook hands.

"I'm glad I know some one in Lukin," said Connor. "Good night, again."

CHAPTER IV.

CONNOR SEES A HORSE.

WHEN Connor awakened the next morning, after his first impression of blinding light, he closed his eyes and waited for the sense of unhappy doom which usually comes to men of tense nerves and active life after sleep; but, with slow and pleasant wonder, he realized that the old numbness of brain and fever of pulse was gone. Then he looked up and lazily watched the shadow of the vine at his window move across the ceiling, a dim-bordered shadow continually changing as the wind gathered the leaves in solid masses and shook them out again. He pored upon this for a time, and next he watched a spider spinning a web in the corner; she worked in a draft which repeatedly lifted her from her place before she had fastened her thread, and dropped her a foot or more into space. Connor sat up to admire the artisan's skill and courage. Compared to men and insects, the spider really worked over an abyss two hundred feet deep, suspended by a silken thread. Connor slipped out of bed and stood beneath the growing web while the main cross threads were being fastened. He had been there for some time when, turning away to rub the ache out of the back of his neck, he again met the contrast between the man of this morning and the man of other days.

This time it was his image in the mirror, meeting him as he turned. That deep wrinkle in the middle of the forehead was half erased. The lips were neither compressed nor loose and shaking, and the eye was calm—it rested him to meet that glance in the mirror.

A mood of idle content always brings one to the window: Connor looked out on the street. A horseman hopped past like a day shadow, the hoofbeats muffled by thick sand, and the wind, moving at an exactly equal pace, carried a mist of dust just behind the horse's tail. Otherwise there was neither life nor color in the street of weather-beaten, low buildings, and the eye of Connor went beyond the roofs and began to climb the mountains. Here was a bald bright cliff, there a drift of trees, and again a surface of raw clay from which the upper soil had recently slipped; but these were not stopping points—they were rather the steps which led the glance to a sky of pale and transparent blue, and Connor felt a great desire to have that sky over him in place of a ceiling.

He splashed through a hasty bath, dressed, and ran down the stairs, humming. Jack Townsend stood on a box in the corner of the room, probing at a spider web in the corner.

"Too late for breakfast?" asked Connor.

The fat shoulders of the proprietor quivered, but he did not turn.

"Too late," he snapped. "Breakfast over at nine. No favorites up here."

Connor waited for the wave of irritation to rise in him, but to his own surprise he found himself saying:

"All right; you can't throw a good horse off his feed by cutting out one meal."

Jack Townsend faced his guest, rubbing his many-folded chin.

"Don't take long for this mountain air to brace up a gent, does it?" he asked rather pointedly.

"I'll tell you what," said Connor. "It isn't the air so much; it's the people that do a fellow good."

"Well," admitted the proprietor modestly, "they may be something in that. Kind of heartier out here, ain't they? More

than in the city, I guess. I'll tell you what," he added. "I'll go out and speak to the missus about a snack for you. It's late, but we like to be obligin'."

He climbed carefully down from the box and started away.

"That girl again," thought Connor, and snapped his fingers. His spirits continued to rise, if that were possible, during the breakfast of ham and eggs, and coffee of a taste so metallic that only a copious use of cream made it drinkable. Jack Townsend, recovering to the full his customary good nature, joined his guest in a huge piece of toast with a layer of ham on it—simply to keep a stranger from eating alone, he said—and while he ate he talked about the race. Connor had noticed that the lobby was almost empty.

"They're over lookin' at the hosses," said Townsend, "and gettin' their bets down."

Connor laid down knife and fork, and resumed them hastily, but thereafter his interest in his food was entirely perfunctory. From the corner of his eye a gleam kept steadily upon the face of Townsend, who continued:

"Speaking personal, Mr. Connor, I'd like to have you look over them hosses yourself."

Connor, on the verge of speech, checked himself with a quick effort.

"Because," continued Townsend, "if I had your advice I might get down a little stake on one of 'em. You see?"

Ben Connor paused with a morsel of ham halfway toward his lips.

"Who told you I know anything about horses?" he asked.

"You told me yourself," grinned the proprietor, "and I'd like to figure how you knew the mare come from the Ballor Valley."

"From which?"

"From the Ballor Valley. You even named the irrigation and sand and all that. But you'd seen her brand before, I s'pose?"

"Hoofs like hers never came out of these mountains," smiled Ben Connor. "See the way she throws them and how flat they are."

"Well, that's true," nodded Jack Town-

send. "It seems simple, now you say what it was, but it had me beat up to now. That is the way with most things. Take a fine hand with a rope. He daubs it on a cow so dead easy any fool thinks he can do the same. No, Mr. Connor, I'd still like to have you come out and take a look at them hosses. Besides"—he lowered his voice—"you might pick up a bit of loose change yourself. They's a plenty rolling round to-day."

Connor laughed, but there was excitement behind his mirth.

"The fact is, Townsend," he said, "I'm not interested in racing now. I'm up here for the air."

"Sure—sure," said the hotel man. "I know all that. Well, if you're dead set it ain't hardly Christian to lure you into betting on a hoss race, I suppose."

He munched at his sandwich in savage silence, while Connor looked out the window and began to whistle.

"They race very often up here?" he asked carelessly.

"Once in a while."

"A pleasant sport," sighed Connor.

"Ain't it, now?" argued Townsend.

"But these gents around here take it so serious that it don't last long."

"That so?"

"Yep. They bet every last dollar they can rake up, and about the second or third race in the year the money's all pooled in two or three pockets. Then the rest go gunnin' for trouble, and most generally find a plenty. Any six races that's got up around here is good for three shooting scrapes, and each shooting's equal to one corpse and half a dozen put away for repairs." He touched his forehead, marked with a white line. "I used to be considerable," he said.

"H-m," murmured Connor, grown absentminded again.

"Yes, sir," went on the other. "I've seen the boys come in from the mines with enough dust to choke a mule, and slap it all down on the hoss. I've seen twenty thousand cold bucks lost and won on a dinky little pinto that wasn't worth twenty dollars hardly. That's how crazy they get."

Connor wiped his forehead.

"Where do they race?" he asked.

"Right down Washington Avenue. That is the main street, y' see. Gives 'em about half a mile of runnin'."

A cigarette appeared with magic speed between the fingers of Connor, and he began to smoke, with deep inhalations, expelling his breath so strongly that the mist shot almost to the ceiling before it flattened into a leisurely spreading cloud. Townsend, fascinated, seemed to have forgotten all about the horse race, but there was in Connor a suggestion of new interest, a certain businesslike coldness.

"Suppose we step over and give the ponies a glance?" he queried.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Townsend. "And I'll take any tip you have!"

This made Connor look at his host narrowly, but, dismissing a suspicion from his mind, he shrugged his shoulders, and they went out together.

The conclave of riders and the betting public had gathered at the farther end of the street, and it included the majority of Lukin. Only the center of the street was left religiously clear, and in this space half a dozen men led horses up and down with ostentatious indifference, stopping often to look after cinches which they had already tested many times. As Connor came up he saw a group of boys place their wagers with a stakeholder—knives, watches, nickels and dimes. That was a fair token of the spirit of the crowd. Wherever Connor looked he saw hands raised, brandishing greenbacks, and for every raised hand there were half a dozen clamorous voices.

"Quite a bit of sporting blood in Lukin, eh?" suggested Townsend.

"Sure," sighed Connor. He looked at the brandished money. "A field of wheat," he murmured, "waiting for the reaper. That's me."

He turned to see his companion pull out a fat wallet.

"Which one?" gasped Townsend. "We ain't got hardly any time."

Connor observed him with a smile that tucked up the corners of his mouth.

"Wait a while, friend. Plenty of time to get stung where the ponies are concerned. We'll look them over."

Townsend began to chatter in his ear: "It's between Charlie Haig's roan and Cliff Jones's Lightning— You see that bay? Man, he can surely get across the ground. But the roan ain't so bad. Oh, no!"

"Sure they are."

The gambler frowned. "I was about to say that there was only one horse in the race, but—" He shook his head despairingly as he looked over the riders. He was hunting automatically for the fleshless face and angular body of a jockey; among them all Charlie Haig came the closest to this light ideal. He was a sun-dried fellow, but even Charlie must have weighed well over a hundred and forty pounds; the others made no pretensions toward small poundage, and Cliff Jones must have scaled two hundred.

"Which was the one hoss in your eyes?" asked the hotel man eagerly.

"The gray. But with that weight up the little fellow will be anchored."

He pointed to a gray gelding which nosed confidently at the back hip pockets of his master.

"Less than fifteen hands," continued Connor, "and a hundred and eighty pounds to break his back. It isn't a race; it's murder to enter a horse handicapped like that."

"The gray?" repeated Jack Townsend, and he glanced from the corner of his eyes at his companion, as though he suspected mockery. "I never seen the gray before," he went on. "Look sort of underfed, eh?"

Connor apparently did not hear. He had raised his head and his nostrils trembled, so that Townsend did not know whether the queer fellow was about to break into laughter or a trade.

"Yet," muttered Connor, "he might carry it. God, what a horse!"

He still looked at the gelding, and Townsend rubbed his eyes and stared to make sure that he had not overlooked some possibilities in the gelding. But he saw again only a lean-ribbed pony with a long neck and a high croup. The horse wheeled, stepping as clumsily as a gangling yearling. Townsend's amazement changed to suspicion and then to indifference.

"Well," he said, smiling covertly, "are you going to bet on that?"

Connor made no answer. He stepped up to the owner of the gray, a swarthy man whose Indian blood told in the discolored whites of his eyes. His half sleepy, half sullen expression cleared when the white man shook hands and introduced himself as a lover of fast horseflesh.

He even congratulated the Indian on owning so fine a specimen, at which apparently subtle mockery Townsend, in the rear, set his teeth to keep from smiling; and the half-breed also frowned, to see if there were any hidden insult. But Connor had stepped back and was looking at the forelegs of the gelding.

"There's bone for you," he said exultantly. "More than eight inches, eh—that Cannon?"

"Huh," grunted the owner, "I dunno."

But his last shred of suspicion disappeared as Connor, working his fingers along the shoulder muscles of the animal, smiled with pleasure and admiration.

"My name's Bert Sims," said the half-breed, "and I'm glad to know you. Most of the boys in Lukin think my hoss ain't got a chance in this race."

"I think they're right," answered Connor without hesitation.

The eyes of the half-breed flashed.

"I think you're putting fifty pounds too much weight on him," explained Connor.

"Yeh?"

"Can't another man ride your horse?"

"Anybody can ride him."

"Then let that fellow yonder—that youngster—have the mount. I'll back the gray to the bottom of my pocket if you do."

"I wouldn't feel hardly natural seeing another man on him," said the Indian. "If he's rode I'll do the riding. I've done it for fifteen years."

"What?"

"Fifteen years."

"Is that horse fifteen years old?" asked Connor, prepared to smile.

"He is eighteen," answered Bert Sims quietly.

The gambler cast a quick glance at Sims and a longer one at the gray. He parted

the lips of the horse, and then cursed softly.

"You're right," said Connor. "He is eighteen."

He was frowning in deadly earnestness now.

"Accident, I suppose?"

The Indian merely stared at him.

"Is the horse a strain of blood or an accident? What's his breed?"

"He's an Eden gray."

"Are there more like him?"

"The valley's full of 'em, they say," answered Bert Sims.

"What valley?" snapped the gambler.

"I ain't been in it. If I was I wouldn't talk."

"Why not?"

In reply Sims rolled the yellow-stained whites of his eyes slowly toward his interlocutor. He did not turn his head, but a smile gradually began on his lips and spread to a sinister hint at mirth. It put a grim end to the conversation, and Connor turned reluctantly to Townsend. The latter was clamoring.

"They're getting ready for the start. Are you betting on that runt of a gray?"

CHAPTER V.

CONNOR LOSES A BET.

CONNOR shook his head almost sadly. "A horse that stands not a hair more than fourteen-three, eighteen years old, with a hundred and eighty pounds up—No, I'm not a fool."

"Which is it—the roan or the bay?" gasped Townsend. "Which d'you say? I'll tell you about the valley after the race. Which hoss, Mr. Connor?"

Thus appealed to, the gambler straightened and clasped his hands behind his back. He looked coldly at the horses.

"How old is that brown yonder—the one the boy is just mounting?"

"Three. But what's he got to do with the race?"

"He's a shade too young, or he'd win it. That's what he has to do with it. Back Haig's horse, then. The roan is the best bet."

"Have you had a good look at Lightning?"

"He won't last in this going with that weight up."

"You're right," panted Townsend. "And I'm going to risk a hundred on him. Hey, Joe, how d'you bet on Charlie Haig?"

"Two to one."

"Take you for a hundred. Joe, meet Mr. Connor."

"A hundred it is, Jack. Can I do anything for you, Mr. Connor?"

"I'll go a hundred on the roan, sir."

"Have I done it right?" asked Townsend fiercely, a little later. I wonder do you know?"

"Ask that after the race is over," smiled Connor. "After all, you have only one horse to be afraid of."

"Sure; Lightning—but he's enough."

"Not Lightning, I tell you. The gray is the only other horse to be afraid of, though the brown stallion might do if he has enough seasoning."

For a moment panic brightened the eyes of Townsend, and then he shook the fear away.

"I've done it now," he said huskily, "and they's no use talking. Let's get down to the finish."

The crowd was streaming away from the start, and headed toward the finish half a mile down the street beyond the farther end of Lukin. Most of this distance Townsend kept his companion close to a run; then he suddenly appealed for a slower pace.

"It's my heart," he explained. "Nothin' else bothers it, but during a hoss race it sure stands on end. I get to thinkin' of what my wife will say if I lose; and that always plumb upsets me."

He was, in fact, spotted white and purple when they joined the mob which packed both sides of the street at the finish posts; already the choice positions were taken.

"We won't get a look," groaned Townsend.

But Connor chuckled: "You tie on to me and we'll get to the front in a squeeze." And he ejected himself into the mob. How it was done Townsend could never understand. They oozed through the thickest

of the crowd, and when roughly pressed men ahead of them turned around, ready to fight, Connor was always looking back, apparently forced along by the pressure from the rear. He seemed, indeed, to be struggling to keep his footing, but in a few minutes Townsend found himself in the front rank. He mopped his brow and smiled up into the cool face of Connor, but there was no time for comments. Eight horses fretted in a ragged line far down the street, and as they frisked here and there the brims of the sombreros of the riders flapped up and down; only the Eden gray stood with downward head, dreaming.

"No heart," said Townsend, "in that gray hoss. Look at him!"

"Plenty of head, though," replied Connor; "here they go!"

His voice was lost in a yell that went up wailing, shook into a roar, and then died off, as though a gust of wind had cut the sounds away. A murmur of voices followed, and then an almost womanish yell, for Lightning, the favorite, was out in front, and his rider leaned in the saddle with arm suspended and a quirt which never fell. The rest were a close group where whips worked ceaselessly, except that in the rear of all the rest the little gray horse ran without urge, smoothly, as if his rider had given up all hope of winning and merely allowed his horse to canter through.

"D'you see?" screamed Townsend. "Is that what you know about hosses, Mr. Connor? Look at Cliff Jones's Lightning! What do you—?"

He cut his upbraidings short, for Connor's was a grisly face, white about the mouth and with gathered brows, as though, with intense effort, he strove to throw the influence of his will into that mass of horse-flesh. The hotel-keeper turned in time to see Lightning, already buckling under the strain, throw up his head.

The heavy burdens, the deep, soft going, and the fact that none of the horses were really trained to sprint, made the half-mile course a very real test, and now the big leader perceptibly weakened. Out of the pack shot a slender brown body, and came to the girth—to the neck of the bay.

"The stallion!" shouted Townsend. "By

God, you do know hosses! Who'd of thought that skinny fellow had it in him?"

"He'll die," said Connor calmly.

The bay and the brown went back into the pack together, even as Connor spoke, though the riders were flogging hard, and now the roan drew to the front. It was plain to see that he had the foot of the rest, for he came away from the crowd with every leap.

"Look! Look! Look!" moaned Townsend. "Two for one! Look!" He choked with pleasure and gripped Connor's arm in both his hands in token of gratitude.

Now the race bore swiftly down the finish, the horses looming bigger; their eyes could be seen, and their straining nostrils now, and the desperate face of each rider, trying to lift his horse into a great burst.

"He's got it," sobbed Townsend, hysterical. "Nothin' can catch him now."

But his companion, in place of answer, stiffened and pointed. His voice was a tone of horror, almost, as he said: "I knew, by God, I knew all the time and wouldn't believe my eyes"

For far from the left, rounding the pack, came a streak of gray. It caught the brown horse and passed him in two leaps; it shot by the laboring bay; and only the roan of Charlie Haig remained in front. That rider, confident of victory, had slipped his quirt over his wrist and was hand-riding his horse when a brief, deep yell of dismay from the crowd made him jerk a glance over his shoulder. He cut the quirt into the flank of the roan, but it was too late. Five lengths from the finish the little gray shoved his nose in front; and from that point, settling toward the earth, as he stretched into a longer and longer stride, every jump increased his margin. The nose of the roan was hardly on the rump of the gelding at the finish.

A bedlam roar came from the crowd. Townsend was cursing and beating time to his oaths with a fat fist. Townsend found so many companion losers that his feelings were readily salved, and he turned to Connor, smiling wryly.

"We can't win every day," he declared, "but I'll tell you this, partner; of all the men I ever seen, you get the medal for

judgin' a hoss. You can pick my string any day."

"Eighteen years old," Connor was saying in the monotonous tone of one hypnotized.

"Hey, there," protested Townsend, perceiving that he was on the verge of being ignored.

"A hundred and eighty pounds," sighed the big man.

Townsend saw for the first time that a stop-watch was in the hand of his companion, and now, as Connor began to pace off the distance, the hotel proprietor tagged behind, curious. Twenty steps from the starting point the larger man stopped abruptly, shook his head, and then went on. When he came to the start he paused again, and Townsend found him staring with dull eyes at the face of the watch.

"What 'd they make it in?" asked the little man.

The other did not hear.

"They ran from this line?" he queried in a husky voice.

"Sure. Line between them posts."

"Fifty-nine seconds!" he kept repeating.

"Fifty-nine seconds! Fifty-nine!"

"What about the fifty-nine seconds?" asked Townsend, and receiving no answer he murmured to himself: "The heat has got to his head."

Connor asked quietly: "Know anything about these gray horses and where they came from?"

"Sure. As much as anybody. Come from yonder in the mountains. A negro raises 'em."

"Negro?"

"Yep, a deaf mute. Ain't ever been heard to say a word."

"And he raises horses like that?"

"Sure."

"And nobody's been up there to try to buy 'em?"

"Too far to go, you see? Long ride and a hard trail. Besides, they's plenty of good hoss-flesh right around Lukin, here."

"Of course," nodded Connor genially.

"Of course there is."

"Besides, them grays is too small. Personally, I don't hanker after a runt of a hoss. I look like a fool on one of 'em."

The voice of Connor was full of hearty agreement.

"So do I. Yes, they're small, if they're all like that one. Too small. Much too small."

He looked narrowly at Townsend from the corner of his eyes to make sure that the hotel proprietor suspected nothing.

"This negro sells some, now and then?"

"Yep. He comes down once in a while and sells a hoss to the first gent he meets—and then walks back to the garden. Always geldings that he sells, I understand. Stand up under work pretty well, those little hosses. Harry Macklin has got one. Harry lives at Fort Andrew. There's a funny yarn out about how Harry—"

"What price does the negro ask?"

"Thinking of getting one of 'em?"

"Me? Of course not! What do I want with a runt of a horse like that? But I was wondering what they pay around here for little horses."

"I dunno."

"What's that story you were going to tell me about Harry Macklin?"

"You see, it was this way—"

And he poured forth the stale anecdote while they strolled back to the hotel. Connor smiled and nodded at appropriate places, but his absent eyes were seeing, once more, the low-running form of the little gray gelding coming away from the rest of the pack.

CHAPTER -VI.

CONNOR TALKS LUCK.

WHEN he arrived at the hotel Ben Connor found the following telegram awaiting him:

Lady Fay in with ninety-eight Trickster did mile and furlong in one fifty-four with one hundred twenty Caledonian stale mile in one thirty-nine Billy Jones looks good track fast.

HARRY SLOCUM.

That message blotted all other thoughts from the mind of Connor. From his traveling bag he brought out a portfolio full of wrinkled papers and pamphlets crowded with lists of names and figures; there fol-

lowed a time of close work. Page after page of calculations scribbled with a soft pencil and in a large, sprawling hand, were torn from a pad, fluttered through the air and lay where they fell. When the hour was ended he pushed away the pamphlets of "dope" and picked up his notes. After that he sat in deep thought and drove puff after puff of cigarette-smoke at the ceiling.

As his brown study progressed he began crumpling the slips in his moist fingers until only two remained. These he balanced on his finger-tips as though their weight might speak to his finely attuned nerves. At length, one hand closed slowly over the paper it held and crushed it to a ball. He flicked this away with his thumb and rose. On the remaining paper was written "Trickster." Connor had made his choice.

That done, his expression softened as men relax after a day of mental strain and he loitered down the stairs and into the street. Passing through the lobby he heard the voice of Jack Townsend raised obviously to attract his attention.

"There he goes now. And nothing but the weight kept him from bettin' on the gray."

Connor heard sounds, not words, for his mind was already far away in a club house, waiting for the "ponies" to file past. On the way to the telegraph office he saw neither street nor building nor face, until he had written on one of the yellow blanks, "A thousand on Trickster," and addressed it to Harry Slocum. Not until he shoved the telegram across the counter did he see Ruth Manning.

She was half-turned from the key, but her head was canted toward the chattering sounder with a blank, inward look.

"Do you hear?" she cried happily. "Bjornsen is back!"

"Who?" asked Connor.

"Sveynrod Bjornsen. Lost three men out of eight, but he got within a hundred and fifty miles of the pole. Found new land, too."

"Lucky devil, eh?"

But the girl frowned at him.

"Lucky, nothing! Bjornsen is a fighter; he lost his father and his older brother up

there three years ago and then he went back to make up for their deaths. Luck?"

Connor, wondering, nodded. "Slipped my mind, that story of Bjornsen. Any other news?"

She made a little gesture, palms up, as though she gathered something from the air.

"News? The old wire has been pouring it at me all morning. Henry Levateur went up thirty-two thousand feet yesterday and the Admiral Barr was launched."

Connor kept fairly abreast of the times, but now he was at sea.

"That's the new liner, isn't it?"

"Thirty thousand tons of liner at that. She took the water like a duck. Well, that's the stuff for Uncle Sam to give them; a few more like the Admiral Barr and we'll have the old colors in every port that calls itself a town. Europe will have to wake up."

She counted the telegram with a sweep of her pencil and flipped the change to Connor out of the coin-box. The rattle of the sounder meant new things to Connor; the edges of the world crowded close, for when the noise stopped, in the thick silence he watched her features relax and the light go out of her eyes. It enabled him to glance into her life in Lukin, with only the chattering wire for a companion. A moment before she had been radiant—now she was a tired girl with purple shadows beneath her eyes making them look ghostly large.

"Oh, Bobby," she called. A tall youth came out of an inner room. "Take the key, please; I'm going out for lunch."

"Come to the hotel with me," suggested Connor.

"Lunch at Townsend's?" She laughed with a touch of excitement. "That's a treat."

Already she gained color and her eyes brightened. She was like a motor, Connor decided, nothing in itself, but responding to every electric current.

"This lunch is on me, by the way," she added.

"Why is that?"

"Because I like to pay on my winning days. I cashed in on the Indian's horse this morning."

In Connor's own parlance—it brought him up standing.

"*You* bet on it? You know horse-flesh, then. I like the little fellow, but the weight stopped me."

He smiled at her with a new friendliness.

"Don't pin any flowers on me," she answered. "Oh, I know enough about horses to look at their hocks and see how they stand; and I don't suppose I'd buy in on a pony that points the toe of a fore-foot—but I'm no judge. I bet on the gray because I know the blood."

She had stopped at the door of the hotel and she did not see the change in Connor's face as they entered.

"Queer thing about horses," she continued. "They show their strain, though the finest man that ever stepped might have a son that's a quitter. Not that way with horses. Why, any scrubby pinto that has a drop of Eden Gray blood in him will run till his heart breaks. You can bet on that."

Lunch at Townsend's, Connor saw, must be the fashionable thing in Lukin. The "masses" of those who came to town for the day ate at the lunch-counters in the old saloons while the select went to the hotel. Mrs. Townsend, billowing about the room in a dress of blue with white polka-dots, when she was not making hurried trips into the kitchen, cast one glance of approval at Ben Connor and another of surprise at the girl. Other glances followed, for the room was fairly well filled, and a whisper went trailing about them, before and behind.

It was easy to see that Ruth Manning was being accused of "scraping" acquaintance with the stranger, but she bore up beautifully, and Connor gauging her with an accurate eye, admired and wondered where she had learned. Yet when they found a table and he drew out a chair for her, he could tell from the manner in which she lowered herself into it that she was not used to being seated. That observation gave him a feeling of power over her.

"You liked the gray, too?" she was saying, as he took his place.

"I lost a hundred betting against him," said the gambler quietly. "I hope you made a killing."

He saw by the slight widening of her eyes that a hundred dollars was a good

deal of money to her; and she flushed as she answered:

"I got down a bet with Jud Alison; it was only five dollars, but I had odds of ten to one. Fifty dollars looks pretty big to me," she added, and he liked her frankness.

"But does everybody know about these grays?"

"Not so many. They only come from one outfit, you see. Dad knew horses, and he told me an Eden Gray was worth any man's money. Poor dad!"

Connor watched her eyes turn dark and dull, but he tossed sympathy aside and stepped forward in the business.

"I've been interested since I saw that little streak of gray shoot over the finish. Eighteen years old. Did you know that?"

"Really? Well, dad said an Eden Gray was good to twenty-five."

"What else did he say?"

"He didn't know a great deal about them, after all, but he said that now and then a deaf and dumb negro comes. He's a regular giant and he has the face of a beast. Whenever he meets a man he gets off the horse and puts a paper into the hand of the other. On the paper it says: 'Fifty dollars in gold coin! Always that.'"

It was like a fairy tale to Connor.

"Jude Harper of Collinsville met him once. He had only ten dollars in gold, but he had three hundred in paper. He offered the whole three hundred and ten to the negro, but the negro only shook his head."

"How often does he come out of the valley?"

"Once a year—once in two years—nobody knows how often. Of course it doesn't take him long to find a man who'll buy a horse like one of the grays for fifty dollars. The minute the horse is sold he turns around and starts walking back. Pete Ricks tried to follow him. He turned back on Pete, jumped on him from behind a rock, and jerked him off his horse. Then he got him by the hair and bent his head back. Pete says he expected to have his neck broken—he was like a child in the arms of that giant. But it seemed that the negro was only telling him in deaf-and-dumb talk that he mustn't follow. After he'd frightened the life out of Pete the big

black went away again, and Pete came home as fast as his horse could carry him."

Connor swallowed. "Where do they get the name Eden Gray?"

"I don't know. Dad said that three things were true about every gray. It's always a gelding; it's always one price, and it always has a flaw. I looked the one over that ran to-day and couldn't see anything wrong, though."

"Cow-hocked," said Connor, breathing hard. "Go on!"

"Dad made up his mind that the reason they didn't sell more horses was because the owner only sold to weed out his stock."

"Wait," said Connor, tapping on the table to make his point. "Do I gather that the only Eden Grays that are sold are the poorest of the lot?"

"That was dad's idea."

"Go on," said Connor.

"You're excited?"

But he answered quickly: "Well, one of those grays beat me out of a hundred dollars. I can't help being interested."

He detached his watch-charm from its catch and began to finger it carelessly; it was the head of an ape carved in ivory yellowed with age.

The girl watched, fascinated, but she made no mention of it, for the jaw of the gambler was set in a hard line, and she felt, subconsciously, a widening distance between them.

"Does the deaf negro own the horses?" he was asking.

"I suppose so."

"This sounds like a regular catechism, doesn't it?"

"I don't mind. Come to think of it, everything about the grays is queer. Well. I've never seen this negro, but do you know what I think? That he lives off there in the mountains by himself because he's a sort of religious fanatic."

"Religion? Crazy, maybe."

"Maybe."

"What's his religion?"

"I don't know," said the girl coldly. "After you jerk lightning for a while you aren't interested much in religion."

He nodded, not quite sure of her posi-

tion, but now her face darkened and she went on, gathering interest in the subject.

"Oh, I've heard 'em rave about the God that made the earth and the stars and all that stuff; the mountains, too. I've heard 'em die asking for mercy and praising God. That's the way dad went. It was drink that got him. But I'm for facts only. Far as I can see, when people come up against a thing they can't understand they just close their eyes and say, God! And when they're due to die, sometimes they're afraid and they say, God—because they think they're going out like a snuffed lantern and never will be lighted again."

The gambler sat with his chin buried in his palm, and from beneath a heavy frown he studied the girl.

"I don't hold malice more than the next one," said the girl, but I saw daddie; and I've been sick of religion ever since. Besides, how do you explain the rotten things that happen in the world? Look at yesterday! The King of the Sea goes down with all on board. Were they all crooks? Were they all ready to die? They can tell me about God, but I say, 'Give me the proofs!'"

She looked at Connor defiantly. "There's just one thing I believe in," she said, "that's luck!"

He did not stir, but still studied her, and she flushed under the scrutiny.

"Not that I've had enough luck to make me fond of it. I've been stuck up here on the edge of the world all my life. And how I've wanted to get away! How I've wanted it! I've begged for a chance—to cut out the work. If it doesn't make callouses on a girl's hands it will make them on her heart. I've been waiting all my life for a chance, and the chance has never come." Something flared in her.

"Sometimes I think," she whispered, "that I can't stand it! That I'd do anything! Anything—just to get away."

She stopped, and as her passion ebbed she was afraid she had said too much.

"Shake," he said, stretching his hand across the table, "I'm with you. Luck! That's all there is running things!"

His fingers closed hard over hers and she winced, for he had forgotten to remove the

ivory image from his hand, and the ape-head cut into her flesh.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL TO EDEN.

THAT evening Ruth sent a boy over to the hotel with a telegram for Connor. It announced that Trickster, at six to one, came home a winner in the Murray. But Connor had time for only a grunt and a nod; he was too busy composing a letter to Harry Slocum, which read as follows:

DEAR HARRY:

I'm about to put my head in the lion's mouth; and in case you don't hear from me again, say within three months, this is to ask you to look for my bones. I'm starting out to nail a thousand-to-one shot. Working a hunch for the biggest clean-up we ever made. I'm going into the mountains to find a deaf-mute negro who raises the finest horses I've ever seen. Do you get that? No white man has gone into that valley; at least, no one has come out talking. But I'm going to bring something with me. If I don't come out it'll be because I've been knocked on the head inside the valley. I'm not telling any one around here where I'm bound, but I've made inquiries, and this is what I gather: No one is interested in the negro's valley, simply because it's so far away. The negro doesn't bother them and they won't bother him. That's the main reason for letting him alone. The other reasons are that he's suspected of being a bad actor.

But the distance is the chief thing that fences people away. The straight cut is bad going. The better way around is a slow journey. It leads west out of Lukin and down into the valley of the Girard River; then along the Girard to its headwaters. Then through the mountains again to the only entrance to the valley. I'm telling you all this so that you'll know what you may have ahead of you. If I'm mum for three months come straight for Lukin; go to a telegraph operator named Ruth Manning, and tell her that you've come to get track of me. She'll give you the names of the best dozen men in Lukin, and you start for the valley with the posse.

Around Lukin they have a sort of foggy fear of the valley bad medicine, they call it.

I have a hard game ahead of me and I'm going to stack the cards. I've got to get into the Garden by a trick and get out again the same way. I start this afternoon.

I've got a horse and a pack mule, and I'm going to try my hand at camping out. If I come back it will be on something that will carry both the pack and me, I think, and it won't take long to make the trip. Our days of being rich for ten days and poor for thirty will be over.

Hold yourself ready; sharp at the end of ninety days, come West if I'm still silent.

As ever,

BEN.

Before the mail took that letter Eastward, Ben Connor received his final advice from Jack Townsend. It was under the hotel man's supervision that he selected his outfit of soft felt hat, flannel shirts, heavy socks, and Napatana boots; Townsend, too, went with him to pick out the pack mule and all the elements of the pack, from salt to canned tomatoes.

As for the horse, Townsend merely stood by to admire while Ben Connor went through a dozen possibilities and picked a solidly built chestnut with legs enough for speed in a pinch, and a flexible fetlock—joins that promised an easy gait.

"You won't have no trouble," said Townsend, as Connor sat the saddle, working the stirrups back and forth and frowning at the creaking new leather. "Wherever you go you'll find gents ready to give you a hand on your way."

"Why's that? Don't I look like an old hand at this game?"

"Not with that complexion; it talks city a mile off. If you'd tell me where you're bound for—"

"But I'm not bound anywhere," answered Connor. "I'm out to follow my nose."

"With that gun you ought to get some game."

Connor laid his hand on the butt of the rifle which was slung in a case under his leg. He had little experience with a gun, but he said nothing.

"All trim," continued Townsend, stepping back to look. "Not a flaw in the mule; no sign of ringbone or spavin', and when a mule ain't got them, he's got nothin' wrong. Don't treat him too well. When you feel like patten' him, cuss him instead. It's mule nature to like a beatin' once in a while; they spoil without it, like

kids. He'll hang back for two days, but the third day he'll walk all over your hoss; never was a hoss that could walk with a mule on a long trip. Well, Mr. Connor, I guess you're all fixed, but I'd like to send a boy along to see you get started right."

"Don't worry," smiled Connor. "I've written down all your suggestions."

"Here's what you want to tie on to special," said the fat man. "Don't move your camp on Fridays or the thirteenth; if you come nigh a town and a black cat crosses your trail, you camp right here and don't move on to that town till the next morning. And wait a minute—if you start out and find you've left something in camp, make a cross in the trail before you go back."

He frowned to collect his thoughts.

"Well, if you don't do none of them three things, you can't come out far wrong. S'long, and good luck, Mr. Connor."

Connor waved his hand, touched the chestnut with his heel and the horse broke into a trot, while the rope, coming taut, first stretched the neck of the mule and then tugged him into a dragging amble. In this manner Connor went out of Lukin. He smiled to himself, as he thought confidently of the far different fashion in which he would return.

The first day gave Connor a raw nose, a sunburned neck and wrists, and his supper was charred bacon and tasteless coffee; but the next morning he came out of the choppy mountains and went down a long, easy slope into the valley of the Girard. There was always water here, and fine grass for the horse and mule, with a cool wind off the snows coming down the ravine. By the third day he was broken into the routine of his work and knew the most vulnerable spot on the ribs of the mule, and had a pet name for the chestnut. Thereafter the camping trip was pleasant enough. It took him longer than he had expected, for he would not press the horse as the pitch of the ravine grew steeper; later he saw his wisdom in keeping the chestnut fresh for the final burst, for when he reached the head-spring of the Girard, he faced a confusion of difficult, naked mountains. He was daunted but determined, and the next morning he

filled his canteens and struck into the last stage of his journey.

Luck gave him cool weather, with high moving clouds, which curtained the sun during the middle of the day, but even then it was hard work. He had not the vestige of a trail to follow; the mountain sides were bare rock. A scattering of shrubs and dwarfed trees found rooting in crevices, but on the whole Connor was journeying through a sea of stone, and sometimes, when the sun glinted on smooth surface, the reflection blinded him. By noon the chestnut was hobbling, and before nightfall even the mule showed signs of distress. And though Connor traveled now by compass, he was haunted by a continual fear that he might have mistaken his way, or that the directions he had picked up at Lukin might be entirely wrong. Evening was already coming over the mountains when he rounded a slope of black rock and found below him a picture that tallied in every detail with all he had heard of the valley.

The first look was like a glance into a deep well of stone with a flash of water in the bottom; afterward he sat on a boulder and arranged the details of that big vista. Nothing led up to the Garden from any direction; it was a freak of nature. Some convulsion of the earth, when these mountains were first rising, perhaps, had split the rocks, or as the surface strata rolled up, they parted over the central lift and left this ragged fissure. Through the valley ran a river, but water could never have cut those saw-tooth cliffs; and Connor noted this strange thing: that the valley came to abrupt ends both north and south. By the slant sunlight, and at that distance—for he judged the place to be some ten or fifteen miles in length—it seemed as if the cliff fronts to the north and south were as solid and lofty as a portion of the sides; yet this could not be unless the river actually disappeared under the face of the wall. Still, he could not make out details from the distance, only the main outline of the place, the sheen of growing things, whether trees or grass, and the glitter of the river which swelled toward the center of the valley into a lake. He could discover only one natu-

ral entrance; in the nearest cliff wall appeared a deep, narrow cleft, which ran to the very floor of the valley, and the only approach was through a difficult ravine. The sore-footed chestnut had caught the flash of green, and now he pricked his ears and whinnied as if he saw home. Connor started down the rocks toward the entrance, leading the horse, while the mule trailed wearily behind. As he turned, the wind blew to him out of the valley a faint rhythmic chiming. When he paused to listen the sound disappeared.

He dipped out of the brighter level into a premature night below; evening was gathering quickly, and with each step Connor felt the misty darkness closing above his head. He was stumbling over the boulders, downheaded, hardly able to see the ground at his feet, yet when he reached the bottom of the little ravine which ran toward the entrance, he looked up to a red sky, and the higher mountains rolled off in waves of light. Distances were magnified; he seemed to look from the bottom of the world to the top of it; he turned, a little dizzy, and between the edges of the cleft that rose straight as Doric pillars, he saw a fire burning at the entrance to the Garden of Eden. The sunset was above them, but the fire sent a long ray through the night of the lower valley. Connor pointed it out to his horse, and the little cavalcade went slowly forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACOB AND EPHRAIM.

WITH every step that he took into the darkness the feeling of awe deepened upon Connor, until he went frowning toward the fire as though it were an eye that watched his coming. He was quite close when the chestnut threw up its head with a snort and stopped, listening; Connor listened as well, and he heard a music of men's voices singing together, faint with distance; the sound traveled so far that he caught the pulse of the rhythm and the fiber of the voices rather than the tune itself, yet the awe which had been growing in Connor gathered suddenly

in his throat. He had to close his hands hard to keep from being afraid.

As though the chestnut felt the strangeness also, he neighed suddenly; the rock walls of the ravine caught up the sound and trumpeted it back. Connor, recovering from the shock, buried his fingers in the nostrils of the horse and choked the sound away; but the echo still went faintly before them and behind. The alarm had been given. The fire winked once and went out. Connor was left without a light to guide him; he looked up and saw that the sunset flush had fallen away to a dead gray.

He looked ahead to where the fire had been. Just then the horse jerked his nose away and gasped in a new breath. Even that slight sound flurried Connor, for it might guide the unknown danger to him. Connor remembered that after all he was not a bandit stealing upon a peaceful town; he composed his mind and his nerves with an effort, and was about to step forward again when he saw in the night just before him a deeper shade among the shadows. Peering, he discovered the dim outlines of a man.

Ben Connor was not a coward, but he was daunted by this apparition. His first impulse was to flee; his second was to leap at the other's throat. It spoke much for his steadiness in a crisis that he did neither, but called instead: "Who's there?"

Metal gritted on metal, and a shaft of light poured into Connor's face so unexpectedly that he shrank. The chestnut roared, and turning to control the horse, Connor saw his eyes and the eyes of the mule shining like phosphorus. When he had quieted the gelding he saw that it was a hooded lantern which had been uncovered. Not a ray fell on the bearer of the light.

"I saw a light down here," said Connor, after he had tried in vain to make out the features of the other. "It looked like a fire, and I started for it; I've lost my bearing in these mountains."

Without answering, the bearer of the lantern kept the shaft staring into Connor's face for another moment; then it was as suddenly hooded and welcome darkness

covered the gambler. With a gesture which he barely could make out, the silent man waved him forward down the ravine. It angered Connor, this mummerly of speechlessness, but with his anger was an odd feeling of helplessness as though the other had a loaded gun at his head.

The man walked behind him as they went forward, and presently the fire shone out at them from the entrance to the valley; thus Connor saw the blanket which had screened the fire removed, and caught a glimpse of a second form.

Even the zenith was dark now, and it was double night in the ravine. With the chestnut stumbling behind him, Connor entered the circle of the fire and was stopped by the raised hand of the second man.

"Why are you here?" said the guard.

The voice was thin, but the articulation thick and soft, and as the questioner stepped into the full glow of the fire, Connor saw a negro whose head was covered by white curls. He was very old; it seemed as though time had faded his black pigment, and now his skin, a dark bronze, was puckered at the corners of his mouth, about his eyes, and in the center of his forehead, seeming to have dried in wrinkles like parchment. While he talked his expression never varied from the weary frown; yet years had not bowed him, for he stood straight as a youth, and though his neck was dried away until it was no thicker than a strong man's forearm, he kept his head high and looked at Connor.

The man who had gone out to stop Connor now answered for him, and turning to the voice the gambler saw that this fellow was a negro likewise; as erect as the one by the fire, but hardly less ancient.

"He is lost in the mountains, and he saw the fire at the gate, Ephraim."

Ephraim considered Connor wistfully.

"This way is closed," he said; "you cannot pass through the gate."

The gambler looked up; a wall of rock on either side rose so high that the fire-light failed to carry all the distance, and the darkness arched solidly above him. The calm of the negroes, their good English, stripped him of an advantage which

he felt should be his, but he determined to appear at ease.

"Your best way," continued Ephraim, "is toward that largest mountain. You see where its top is still lighted in the west, while the rest of the range is black."

The persistent good grammar irritated Connor, and examining the withered features of the two old men more closely, he saw that they were negroes in color alone.

"Jacob can take you up from the ravine and show you the beginning of the way. But do not pass beyond the sight of the fire, Jacob."

"Good advice," nodded Connor, forcing himself to smile, "if it weren't that my horse is too sore-footed to carry me. Even the mule can hardly walk—you see."

He waved his hand and the chestnut threw up its head and took one or two halting steps to the side.

"In the meantime, I suppose you've no objection if I sit down here for a moment or two?"

Ephraim, bowing as though he ushered the other into an apartment of state, waved to a smooth-topped boulder comfortably near the fire.

"I wish to serve you," he went on, "in anything I can do without leaving the valley. We have a tank just inside the gate, and Jacob will fill your canteen and water the horse and mule as well."

"Kind of you," said Connor. "Cigarette?"

The proffered smoke brought a wringing of amazed delight into the face of Ephraim and his withered hand stretched tentatively forth. Jacob forestalled him with a cry and snatched the cigarette from the open palm of Connor. He held it in both his cupped hands.

"Tobacco—again!" He turned to Ephraim. "I have not forgotten!"

Ephraim had folded his arms with dignity, and now he turned a reproving glance upon his companion.

"Is it permitted?" he asked coldly.

The joy went out of the face of Jacob.

"What harm?"

"Is it permitted?" insisted Ephraim.

"He will not ask," argued Jacob dubiously.

"He knows without asking."

At this, very slowly and unwillingly, Jacob put the cigarette back into the hand of Ben Connor. A dozen curious questions came into the mind of the gambler, but he decided wisely to change the subject.

"The boss gives you orders not to leave, eh?" he went on. "Not a step outside the gate? What's the idea?"

"This thing was true in the time of the old masters. Only Joseph can leave the valley," Ephraim answered.

"And you don't know why no one is allowed inside the valley?"

"I have never asked," said Ephraim.

Connor smoked fiercely, peering into the fire.

"Well," he said at length, "you see my troubles? I can't get into the valley to rest up. I have to turn around and try to cross those mountains."

"Yes," nodded Ephraim.

"But the horse and mule will never make it over the rocks. I'll have to leave them behind or stay and starve with them."

"That is true."

"Rather than do that," said Connor, fencing for an opening, "I'd leave the poor devils here to live in the valley."

"That can not be. No animals are allowed to enter."

"What? You'd allow this pair to die at the gate of the valley?"

"No; I should lead them first into the mountains."

"This is incredible! But I tell you, this horse is my friend—I can't desert him!"

He fumbled in his coat pocket and then stretched out his hand toward the chestnut; the horse hobbled a few steps nearer and nosed the palm of it expectantly.

"So!" muttered Ephraim, and shaded his eyes with his hand to look. He settled back and said in a different voice: "The horse loves you; it is sad."

"I put the matter squarely up to you," said Connor. "You see how I stand. Give me your advice!"

The negro protested. "No, no! I cannot advise you. I know nothing of what goes on out yonder. Nevertheless—"

He broke off, for Connor was lighting another cigarette from the butt of the first

one, and Ephraim paused to watch, nodding with a sort of vicarious pleasure as he saw Connor inhale deeply and then blow out a thin drift of smoke.

"You were about to say something else when I lighted this."

"Yes, I was about to say that I could not advise you, but I can send to Joseph. He is near us now."

"By all means send to Joseph."

"Jacob," ordered the keeper of the gate, "go to Joseph and tell him what has happened."

The other nodded, and then whistled a long note that drifted up the ravine. Afterward there was no answer, but Jacob remained facing expectantly toward the inside of the valley and presently Connor heard a sound that made his heart leap, the rhythmic hoof-beats of a galloping horse; and even in the darkness the long interval between impacts told him something of the animal's gait. Then into the circle of the firelight broke a gray horse with his tail high, his mane fluttering. He brought his gallop to a mincing trot and came straight toward Jacob, but a yard from the negro he stopped and leaped catlike to one side; with head tossed high he stared at Connor.

Cold sweat stood on the forehead of the gambler, for it was like something he had seen, something he remembered; all his dreams of what a horse should be, come true.

Ephraim was saying sternly:

"In my household the colts are taught better manners, Jacob."

And Jacob answered, greatly perturbed: "There is a wild spirit in all the sons of Harith."

"It is Cassim, is it not?" asked Ephraim.

"Peace, fool!" said Jacob to the stallion, and the horse came and stood behind him, still watching the stranger over the shoulder of his master.

"Years dim your eyes, Ephraim," he continued. "This is not Cassim and he is not the height of Cassim by an inch. No, it is Abra, the son of Hira, who was the daughter of Harith."

He smiled complacently upon Ephraim, nodding his ancient head, and Ephraim frowned.

"It is true that my eyes are not as young as yours, Jacob; but the horses of my household are taught to stand when they are spoken to and not dance like foolish children."

This last reproof was called forth by the continual weaving back and forth of the stallion as he looked at Connor, first from one side of Jacob and then from the other. The old negro now turned with a raised hand.

"Stand!" he ordered.

The stallion jerked up his head and became rigid.

"A sharp temper makes a horse without heart," said the oracular Ephraim.

Jacob scowled, and rolling his eyes angrily, searched for a reply; but he found none. Ephraim clasped one knee tightly in both hands, and weaving his head a little from side to side, delighted in his triumph.

"And the hand which is raised," went on the tormentor, "should always fall."

He was apparently quoting from an authority against which there was no appeal; now he concluded:

"Threats are for children, and yearlings; but a grown horse is above them."

"The spirit of Harith has returned in Abra," said Jacob gloomily. From that month of April when he was foaled he has been a trial and a burden; yes, if even a cloud blows over the moon he comes to my window and calls me. There was never such a horse since Harith. However, he shall make amends. Abra!"

The stallion stepped nearer and halted, alert.

"Go to him, fool. Go to the stranger and give him your head. Quick!"

The gray horse turned, hesitated, and then came straight to Connor, very slowly; there he bowed his head and dropped his muzzle on the knee of the white man, but all the while his eyes flared at the strange face in terror. Jacob turned a proud smile upon Ephraim, and the latter nodded.

"It is a good colt," he admitted. "His heart is right, and in time he may grow to some worth."

Once more Connor fumbled in his pocket.

"Steady," he said, looking squarely into the great, bright eyes. "Steady, boy."

He put his hand under the nose of the stallion.

"It's a new smell, but little different."

Abra snorted softly, but though he shook he dared not move. The gambler, with a side glance, saw the two negroes watching intently.

"Ah," said Connor, "you have pulled against a headstall here, eh?"

He touched an old scar on the cheek of the horse, and Abra closed his eyes, but opened them again when he discovered that no harm was done to him by the tips of those gentle fingers.

"You may let him have his head again," said Connor. "He will not leave me now until he is ordered."

"So?" exclaimed Jacob. "We shall see! Enough, Abra!"

The gray tossed up his head at that word, but after he had taken one step he returned and touched the back of the white man's hand, snuffed at his shoulder and at at his hat and then stood with pricking ears. A soft exclamation came in unison from the two negroes.

"I have never seen it before," muttered Jacob. "To see it, one would say he was a son of Julanda."

"It is my teaching and not the blood of Julanda that gives my horses manners," corrected Ephraim. "However, if I might look in the hand of the stranger—"

"There is nothing in it," answered Connor, smiling, and he held out both empty palms. "All horses are like this with me."

"Is it true?" they murmured together.

"Yes; I don't know why. But you were going to bring Joseph."

"Ah," said Ephraim, shaking his head. "I had almost forgotten. Hurry, Jacob; but if you will take my advice in the matter you will teach your colts fewer tricks and more sound sense."

The other grunted, and putting his hand on the withers of Abra, he leaped to the back with the lightness of a strong youth. A motion of his hand sent the gray into a gallop that shot them through the gate into darkness.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Gloom on Second Base



by Charles Divine

JERRY leaped toward the ball. It was a tantalizing grounder, rolling so slowly that it looked as if it could never be gathered in before the batter reached first. Two men were out, and the runner on third was halfway to the plate with a tally that would count mightily against us unless Jerry made a grand-stand play.

The crowd held its breath and watched. Jerry ran with his head lunging forward. Bending over, with his bare right hand he scooped up the ball on the run and shot it across to Cuddy at first base with an underhand swing.

"Ow-w-wt!" cried the umpire, jerking his arm upward.

The crowd breathed again. There were many yells of delight that must have done Gill Gillespie's heart good, for we were in sixth place in the league standing, and our manager had been looking in vain for improvement in our play.

"Nice work, Jerry!" the fans called to the rangy second baseman as we came to the bench for our half of the seventh.

Handclapping rippled over the grand stand in tribute to Jerry Potter, but he touched the brim of his cap reluctantly and frowned.

At once Gillespie let out a cry of protest. "What's the matter? You get a good hand for a snappy piece of fielding, and yet you

look as if you'd lost your meal ticket. Can't you smile once in a while?"

"If the ball had been hit harder I could have waited for it," returned Jerry.

"There you go!" exploded Gillespie. "Always complaining, always pessimistic." Suddenly his face grew redder and anger glinted in his eyes; he shook an admonishing finger at Jerry's solemn face. "I won't stand for it much longer. You may be hitting over two-eighty, but your dismal moods get my goat. I won't have a gloom on second base. It has a bad influence on the rest of the players."

Jerry stared at him soberly. "It's better than a Pollyanna, isn't it? That stuff makes one sick at the stomach."

"I don't know what you mean, but I'll tell you one thing that's final—if you keep on like this, with never a cheerful word, you'll be looking for another berth."

Gillespie turned away abruptly and began talking to Kingsley, the principal stockholder and treasurer. Some of the players sitting on the bench chuckled over Jerry's new title, "the gloom on second base," but others of us were worried about it. Jerry was such a decent, easy-going fellow at heart that every one of us would have hated to see him let out, and yet we knew that when Gill spoke as he had done it boded ill for Jerry's continuance with the

team. The trouble was that Jerry and Gill were opposites: Jerry was always finding a fly in the ointment, whereas Gill was an optimist who believed the flies could always be caught by a right-thinking fielder.

Jerry was a good enough fielder, who could go to either side of second base with equal ease and peg like a rifle shot from any position. He was honest and likable, and we were all fond of him as a teammate; but we knew that as a fount of merriment he was as dry as the Sahara.

"Come on, boys!" cried Gill, as Morrison went to bat for us. "A little life now. Let's have no glooming around here." He gave Jerry Potter a significant, sidelong glance.

At that moment a tall and willowy stranger strolled up to the bench and inquired for the manager in a manner almost regal. To Gillespie he introduced himself glibly.

"I'm Boughton—Ben Boughton, your new second baseman."

We sat up, open-mouthed.

"I'm ready to jump into a suit at once," he continued airily. "Great little town, this home of the Bings, you have here, Mr. Gillespie, though I've seen most of the cities on the face of the globe. Yes, I'm Boughton, your new second baseman."

We continued to stare at him, dazed. A new second baseman! Jerry, lounging on the bench among us, looked bewildered. It was hard to believe that the blow had really fallen and that Jerry was going to have the can tied to him. The players leaned forward to catch Gillespie's reply.

"I don't know yet as you'll be my second baseman. I want you to cover short for a while. I've got to lay off. Got a bad side."

Gill had strained some muscles in his right side, but no one suspected that he was going to take time off to nurse the injury. Now it appeared that the newcomer, after playing shortstop a while, might replace Jerry at second.

"Suits me," announced Boughton with loud assurance. "I understand perfectly. After you've had your little rest, Gillespie, you'll return to short and I'll go to second

—when you've seen how well I handle myself on the diamond. Suits me perfectly. I like to fight for a job.

"I've done it before, all over the world, from Hongkong to Coney Island. I'm a great traveler, I am. That's one reason I came here; had never seen this town before, though I will say it has an attractive site at the junction of your two rivers, the Susquehanna and Chenango. Quaint old Indian names—Susquehanna meaning long and crooked, Chenango meaning short and shady—I understand the rivers partake of those very characteristics."

He paused reflectively. There was a hurt look in Jerry Potter's eyes as he glanced from Gillespie to the stranger, who continued: "Most of my time's been spent in the West—out where they grow men, and the men grow corns on their trigger fingers, and—"

"Blisters on their tongues," said Jerry under his breath.

"In the West—out where I've gone to bed on the prairies when the only blankets I had were cigarette papers—"

"And you probably bummed those," remarked Jerry.

"But this region has its good points," conceded Boughton, glancing around as if viewing the hills with a connoisseur's eye. "Good farming land, I hear. Saw some fruit trees coming in on the train. Reminded me of dear old California and the Aladdin ranch. I spent a month once picking prunes in dear old California—"

"You mean you picked ferns in dear old Caliprunia."

Boughton pretended not to notice Jerry's remark, at which the players snickered in sympathy. He turned to Jerry and pursued: "What do you raise here?"

"Whiskers and ball-players."

For a moment Boughton was nonplused. But he soon recovered the speech and aplomb that was evidently so native to him, resuming:

"I remember the last time I was on the coast a rumor reached me that the Japanese had taken up baseball. I had always heard a lot about Japanese fans. So I went over and taught them the fine points of the game. Then I headed for India, and

struck across into Persia, later visiting Spain and France. Now that I speak of it, the last time I was in Paris—"

At that point the inning fortunately ended, and we ran out to the field, glad to escape from the globe-trotter's monologue, leaving him pouring out his tales to the bat boys, who had been hardened to anything.

II.

We lost the game. We had been losing far too many. Gill told us that if we did not take a brace and fight our way up to first division by the 15th of July the crowds would quit coming and we'd all be looking for other jobs. Gill got his orders from Kingsley, the treasurer, and Kingsley got his inspirations from a cramped soul and a crabbed pocketbook.

As we filed out of the ball park the only encouraging word any of the fans had for us went to Jerry Potter for the good play he had made, but he was plunged too deep in his own troubles to get any solace from it.

Jerry lived at home when the team was in town, dwelling with his widowed sister and her ten-year-old son, both of whom he supported. The sister took piano lessons and all of Jerry's salary. Now and then I would invite him to a movie show, but this evening, after I had tried to cheer him up with such an entertainment, he only came out saying:

"It might have been a good picture if the hero hadn't worn a sport shirt."

At the hotel, where we went to listen to the boys gossiping on the sidewalk terrace, we found Boughton monopolizing the conversation, still expatiating on his favorite theme—Boughton.

We soon withdrew. Withdrawal began to be the practice with the players whenever Boughton walked into a conversation. Some of them withdrew in order to stifle homicidal instincts. What distressed me most was that Boughton could really play a good game of baseball, though he talked a better one, and I was fearful that he would edge Jerry Potter off the pay roll as soon as Gill got in shape again. Gill was complaining more and more about

Jerry's silent and melancholy nature. To make matters worse, Gill had taken a liking to Boughton's enthusiastic tales, and Kingsley, the clutcher of the club's purse strings, had been completely captivated by some of Boughton's stories of night life in Paris.

"Boughton has an air about him," explained Kingsley to Jerry.

"Yes," said Jerry laconically. "So has a big wind."

The next day, while we were playing the Miners, Jerry went to bat and struck out. It was the first time in weeks that he had failed to hit the ball somewhere, and it was an inauspicious moment for such reversal of form, for Cuddy was on base with a potential run that we needed. Two of the strikes were called on Jerry by Herman, the umpire, and both of them were doubtful. One of them wasn't any closer to the plate than a poet is to an income tax.

Jerry, who realized that he was fighting to hold his job, came back to the bench disconsolate.

"No wonder we can't get hod carriers nowadays. They're all umpiring."

Herman heard the remark, and shot Jerry a warning glance.

Piper, our center fielder, went to bat and drove a neat single down the third-base line which the umpire called a foul.

"Warm up another umpire!" cried Jerry.

Piper came back to the plate, and was called out on a third strike that was so low it brushed his shoe strings.

Jerry walked out toward the plate.

"Get a crowbar and open your eyes," he called to Herman.

The umpire turned around, red in the face.

"My eyes are open."

"Too bad your head isn't!"

At this remark of constructive criticism Herman ordered Jerry out of the game. Then what many of us had been fearing came to pass: Gillespie went in the next inning to play short, and sent Boughton to cover second base; a change which he was able to make at this opportunity without a barefaced removal of Jerry.

Jerry's cup of woe was brimming over.

On the way to the hotel after the game I fell in with Gillespie, who was exulting because the Stars had lost in Syracuse while we were trimming the Miners in our own town, thus sending us up into fifth place. Boughton had contributed to our victory by a lucky single in the ninth which the reporters would have put down for a fielder's error except that they were faint-hearted about messing up a fellow's fielding average.

Gill began to praise Boughton, showing how greatly he preferred his bright manner to Jerry's.

I tried to argue him out of it.

"You know as well as I do," he retorted, "that the fans like to see new faces in the line-up—"

"Yes, but think of the rest of us who have to listen to his line of talk. Oh, Gill!"

"Well, if I thought Boughton was a liar I'd send him away by the first train. But I tell you his stuff is convincing. It rings true; he's the most interesting ball player I've ever met."

I turned away, disgusted with the trend of events. When I saw Jerry after supper he was gloomier than ever.

"It's not like me to strike out the way I did to-day," he lamented. "The trouble is I don't get enough rest at home nights. I don't mind the racket my sister stirs up in the kitchen so much as that at the piano. It's not the rattle of the dishpans; it's the Chopin."

"What do you mean?"

"She's improving what she calls her technique. I've got an entirely different name for it. Last night she went into the second clef. I'd rather she went into hysterics."

III.

It was evident that things were breaking bad for Jerry all around. With the Bings, however, the outlook began to look brighter, for we were within two games of first division, with a fair chance of landing in fourth place within the time limit set by Gillespie. For these next two critical games we went to Elmira, the city that used to think it was more important than

ours—oh, years ago, before we got a lot of snappy industries and boulevard lights. As we started the first of these critical contests Gillespie let it be known, with more invective than vocabulary, that we must make a superhuman effort to show we were ball players. At the conclusion of the two-game series he'd make the choice between Boughton and Jerry.

"Stir 'em up all the time," he counseled as we took the field. "And when you come to bat slam the old pill over Bernstein's advertisement."

He overlooked the fact that nobody in the entire league had yet hit Mr. Bernstein's advertising board, which stood on top of the center-field fence with its picture of a cute young man in Kippy Kut Costume and its blatant challenge of a hundred dollars to the first player who hit a ball against it or over it. Though every player big enough to swing a toothpick had tried to swat the ball against this clothing ad, the hundred-dollar prize went begging—or, rather, Mr. Bernstein was a wise tailor.

Maybe he designed the fence.

In the first game Lavy, our Slavic pitcher, whose real name was Lavipeppisky, but who obligingly shortened it as a favor to sporting writers and linotypers, went wild and almost threw the game away. The only thing that saved it was a two-bagger by Jerry with a man on base. Jerry ought to have been elated, but instead he presented a crestfallen look when I congratulated him that evening.

"What's the matter now?" I asked. "You ought to be grinning from ear to ear. Come on, let's go to the movies and forget the melancholy in this matter-of-fact world."

"It wouldn't have been so bad," he replied, "if there had been three men on base. I hate to hit a two-bagger without the bases full. No, thanks, I can't go to the movies to-night. I've got to hunt up the public library, if they have one in this town."

I gasped. So that was where he had been spending his evenings!

He left me loitering in the hotel lobby, where I was forced to listen to Boughton's recital of what a globe-trotting infielder

could accomplish. For some strange reason he had forsaken his usual chair in front of the hotel and was keeping closely inside, selecting a seat in a remote corner and drawing about him a little group of serious thinkers—some thinking of assault and battery.

He succeeded in attracting Gill and Kingsley, and where the manager and treasurer led a number of others always followed. Later Jerry joined the circle with a handful of books under his arm, and immediately Boughton talked louder of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome and the odors that were Naples. The feeling between Boughton and Jerry had reached a point which a graduate nurse would have put down on her chart in the fever column.

"Now let me tell you about Paris," began Boughton. "The last time I was in Paris I—"

"You ought to be there now," said Jerry, "in one of the catacombs."

Boughton glared at him. The crowd increased, drawn by the promise of conflict, and one of the players went through the pantomime of rattling an imaginary tambourine as if introducing a minstrel show.

Tum-tiddy-tum-tum-tannnnh! "Gentlemen, be seated!"

The audience suited Boughton.

He cleared his throat and, gaining the right of way over his Adam's apple, began again:

"The last time I was in Paris I was walking along the Rue de Rivoli one sunny afternoon—or was it the Avenue de l'Opera?"

"Flip a coin," suggested Jerry dryly. "You own them both."

"Yes, it was the Avenue de l'Opera. All of a sudden a *petite mademoiselle* stopped me and spoke to me in French. I speak French fluently, you know."

"You mean fluidly, don't you?"

"I mean fluently—just what I said, Potter, and if you can't understand what I'm talking about you don't have to listen. I'm conversing with men who comprehend these things, such as Mr. Kingsley here, who, although he has never visited Paris, appreciates the spirit of that fascinating capital."

Mr. Kingsley nodded, flattered. "I know my capabilities, Potter. I can keep my head above water."

"Yes, it's bone dry."

"Listen here, Potter! Pay attention to what I say and you'll learn something. You ought to realize that recent world questions have revived interest in foreign countries and their languages. Here, for example"—he drew a brochure from his pocket—"is a little pamphlet which a bank is giving away for the study of French, containing useful sentences such as, well, take this one: *ici viennent trois voitures*, and so on—"

"Anybody can do the 'and so on.'"

"The sentence means 'Here come three carriages.'"

"Yes," agreed Jerry, looking over his shoulder, "so the translation under it says. I can read English, too."

"Think how valuable that knowledge would be if any of you were in Paris and somebody asked you to find a carriage. You would glance down the street and be able to say: 'Here come three carriages.' Practical stuff, that is."

Jerry let out a grunt of disgust.

"What good would that sentence do me," he demanded, "if I glanced down the streets and saw five carriages coming?"

Boughton pretended to ignore this purely hypothetical question.

"As I was saying, before I was so crudely interrupted, I was walking along the Avenue de l'Opera one afternoon when a *petite mademoiselle* stopped me and spoke to me in French. '*Monsieur*,' she said, 'may I beg a favor of you?' 'Certainly,' I replied, 'I am proud to be of service to you.' 'Oh, la, la!' she cried, 'you are my savior.' Whereupon she began to cry. Tears rolled down her cheeks. 'I am in great distress, *monsieur*.' Whereupon I took her arm—"

"And her pocketbook!" interposed Jerry.

"And told her to dry her tears, and she looked sweetly at me and then let her eyes travel down the street—"

"In one of those carriages?" asked Jerry.

"And then, looking at me again, she—"

"Had an acute attack of indigestion!"

"She said: 'You are an American, are you not, *monsieur*?' And I replied—"

"You replied: 'I am *not*. I'm a liar.'"

"I replied: 'I am not'—say, Potter!"

Boughton glared at Jerry angrily, while Mr. Kingsley leaned forward and advised him not to interrupt. Jerry flushed.

"When I am telling an incident of my travels," said Boughton, "you ought to have sense enough not to interfere with the recital. I've been traveling around this world since I was knee high to a grasshopper. I was born in Boston and educated in New York, and when I was in the Sahara desert I made a camel trip from Algiers north into the sandy wastes. Of course, the farther north from Algiers you go the higher grow the sand dunes; but knowing the region so well as I did—"

Jerry put up his hand in the manner of a traffic cop, decisively.

"Stop right there!" he cried, opening one of the books he had brought from the library. "I thought sooner or later you'd get around to the great Sahara desert. They all do. So I prepared myself with this book on North Africa. Page seventeen." He thumbed the pages, thoroughly at home in them, while Boughton's jaw dropped. Jerry continued, relentlessly: "A map, gentlemen—including Mr. Boughton, advisedly—showing that if you made a camel trip north from Algiers you would be journeying across the broad expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. Of course, camels can go seven days without water, but they can't go with it—not when it's under their feet twenty fathoms deep!"

For a moment there was a tense silence. Boughton gripped the arms of his chair, and for once his tongue failed him. Mr. Kingsley, the treasurer, sat up in haste, as if somebody had tried to put a hand in his purse pocket.

Then all the players made a rush to look at Jerry's volume, followed by an explosion of laughter that shook the lobby.

"That—that's only a book!" cried Boughton deprecatingly, as soon as he recovered himself; "only a book written by somebody who never saw the country." Kingsley and Gillespie nodded their heads

in agreement, while Boughton continued, more and more desperately: "If you think you can contradict me in everything I say, Potter, just contradict me now: I'm going to get more hits to-morrow than you do, and I'm going to be playing second base day after to-morrow. I'll bet you twenty dollars on this to show I've confidence in my own opinion."

"You don't have to bet to convince me of that," returned Jerry laconically.

"Crawling, eh? Afraid to make a little wager. Well, I'm not. I've gambled on everything from Wall Street to Pimlico. I guess you don't know that I used to follow the horses."

"With a blanket and bridle?"

The laughter goaded Boughton into a fury, causing him to draw his willowy height to its utmost and stick out a fist, belligerently.

"Your conversation comes close to being insulting," he said, his face crimson. "You haven't any more idea of what's what than I have of—of—oh, I might go ahead and carry out the contrast, but—"

"If you do," returned Jerry evenly, as he stepped up to him, "they'll carry out a corpse and you'll never hear their footsteps."

At that point verbal hostilities would have developed into fisticuffs if I hadn't grabbed Jerry and led him outside while some of the others dragged Boughton upstairs and threw him in his room to cool off.

"Gee!" complained Jerry in the street. "Why did you pull me away from that amphibious globe-trotter? I might have shown him the canals of Mars."

IV.

FOR six innings the next day, in this decisive game in our pennant race, we battled the Elmirans to a standstill, with neither side scoring, while the crowd of local fans clamored tempestuously for our defeat, and our own little band of rooters, who had come down by train and entrenched themselves close to the third-base line, made themselves heard in their desire for the complete annihilation of our opponents.

Then the break came. In the seventh the Elmirans got a run; we tied it up in our half; in the eighth they added another tally, and in the ninth they made it three, filling the noisy bleachers with the joy of promised victory.

"We only need two to tie 'em!" cried Gill as we came to bat in our half of the ninth. "And three runs will break up the old game. Come on—any way to get on!"

Gill was desperate, and the crowd shared his excitement; everybody stood up. When Pratt, our first batter, worked the pitcher for a base on balls, Gill began to dance up and down in the first base coaching box, crying:

"That-a boy. Everybody walks to-day!"

But Cuddy, the next batter, knocked a grounder to the shortstop, who threw Pratt out at second. Cuddy reached first safely enough, but there was no great cause for rejoicing in that, although the group of Bing fans put their lungs at the imminent peril of bursting.

When Murphy came to bat, Gill begged him to get on base if he had to get hit in the head to do it. Murphy evidently believed in making his own anatomical selection for such a sacrifice, for he received a fast inshoot in the ribs. The umpire waved him down to first. Gill waved both hands in the air jubilantly, while the pitcher protested in vain. Herman was umpiring, and when he made a decision he stuck to it like a porous plaster.

Then Boughton advanced to the plate, promising to bring in the men on base. Although his recent conversational debacle had convinced the rest of the players that his personality, to quote the words of Shakespeare, was "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," yet Gill retained great confidence in him, and cried:

"You know what to do, Boughton. Here's our big inning!"

Boughton swung at the first ball and knocked a neat liner—into the grand stand back of him. He let the next one go by; the ump called it a ball. Then he fouled another, this time along the third base line.

Jerry Potter, who stood waiting his turn at bat, let out a groan.

"Well, Boughton, you've hit it on both sides. Now slam it in the middle."

Boughton slammed the next one, but it was only a high fly back of first.

"Run it out, run it out!" cried Gill, and Boughton went loping down to first.

The cheering of our handful of Bing fans died away, lost in the roar of the crowd as the Elmira first baseman got under the ball and caught it.

Boughton turned back to the bench. As he did so a round-faced young man in the front row of the bleachers stood up and shouted at him:

"Hello, Bennie! Come over here and shake your old pal by the hand!"

Morrison, our substitute catcher, stood near enough to hear him and to see the youth's ample countenance beam with friendly recognition. Boughton, however, returned no answering smile. He took one cold glance at the gesticulating spectator, gave a start of surprise, and continued on to the bench faster than was necessary.

Morrison shrewdly decided that the round-faced fellow was worth investigating, and, walking to the bleachers, he asked him if he knew Boughton.

"Know him?" He gave such an energetic nod that it unsettled his straw hat and revealed a rustic mop of hair. "Know him? I reckon I do! Though his last name didn't use to be Boughton. Why, Ben and I were brought up together, chums for sixteen years; but darned if he ain't getting too high-toned to speak to me any more. That's a low-down trick!"

Morrison gasped and grabbed the fellow by the arm, shooting questions at him so fast he choked with over-articulation.

"I come from Upper Sidney, 'bout ten miles from here. Yep, Ben comes from there, too. Naw, he wasn't born in Boston and educated in New York. Did he tell you that? He was born in Upper Sidney, I tell you, in old man Dobson's shanty by the railroad tracks. Yes, sirree, and he lived there right along until he got the baseball bug and took up with a professional league. Folks said the village would be a lot quieter now that he'd left."

It became evident to Morrison why Boughton had stuck so close to the hotel in

Elmira, a city that was only ten miles from the community that knew him from the cradle to the bat.

"Then he's never been in the West, or in Europe or India—"

"Ben ain't been out o' this State, though he always was a great hand for making believe he had."

Morrison seized the young man and lifted him, dazed, over the bleacher railing to the ground.

"Come with me. I want to show you to our manager."

As Morrison lugged his astonished companion toward the bench he saw Jerry Potter at bat, where he had been trying in vain to fix his eye on a ball that looked good. Cuddy and Murphy were still on first and second, with two out, and the game all over but the shouting, unless—

Crack!

Morrison stopped in his tracks, his grip tight on his prisoner's arm.

Jerry had hit the ball fairly on the nose. It sped like a shot over the Elmira pitcher's head and sailed on over second base with undiminished speed.

"Let go!" cried the resident of Upper Sidney to Morrison. "You're hurting my arm."

The ball kept on soaring, magnificently, until it passed over the head of the fleeing centerfielder, while Jerry was tearing his spikes into the dust beyond first base to the accompaniment of wild cheers.

Then the ball outdistanced the centerfielder and bumped against Mr. Bernstein's clothing sign on the very spot where big Gothic letters announced the hundred dollars reward. Jerry was on his way home with the winning run.

Out of the triumphant hurly-burly that ensued—the hysteria of Bing fans, the happy confusion on our own bench—Morrison snatched Gill by the arm and intro-

duced him to the Upper Sidney resident and let him see how badly he had been duped by Boughton. Then Gill wheeled around and took Jerry by the hand, congratulating him on coming home with the winning run, and assuring him that his job at second was good for the season, and as many more seasons as he was manager.

He turned to denounce Boughton with managerial eloquence, but the globe-trotter had vanished, setting out on another journey from which he never returned to us.

A boy came through the crowd and handed Jerry a slip of paper good for one hundred dollars at Mr. Bernstein's shop. We knew the prize would loom up like a fortune to Jerry, being the first piece of money he had had to himself all season, except the monthly salary which was his to have and to hold only while he was carrying it from the treasurer to his sister's piano-haunted parlor.

Now, at last, a hero and a prize winner, Jerry could relax his grim features and smile with the rest of us, pushing forward to congratulate him and share his joy.

But, to our amazement, there was no answering light in his face.

"Why in blazes don't you smile?" We pounded him on the back.

"Oh, you don't understand," he complained bitterly. "I had counted on going straight to the hotel after the game and hitting the hay for a twelve-hour pillow ride. And now this happens and upsets all my plans."

"But you've cinched your job, and won a hundred dollars in the bargain. What more do you want?" We shook him by the arm as if to wake him from a dream. "One hundred dollars!"

"That's just it." He sighed mournfully. "I've got to chase all the way up-town to that darned tailor's shop to collect the money. Ain't that hell!"



NEXT WEEK

A stirring Complete Novelette of railroad construction life

"THE BOSS OF CAMP K"

BY JOHN HOLDEN, Author of "The Drifter"



The Lady in Blue

Part II

by *Augusta Groner*
and *Grace Isabel Colbron*

Authors of "The Man with the Black Cord," "Joe Muller, Detective," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

BEAUTIFUL Lady in Blue, so-called from her favorite color, is found dead, stabbed. The handsome house had been leased for her by Baron Wallroth, to whom she, Elise Lehman, was engaged to be married. Tony, maid and companion, was also remarkably pretty, and seemed very refined for her position. Mrs. Deisler, the caretaker, and Buchner, the gardener, ventured that their mistress was not really a "fine lady" in spite of her apparent wealth. But Tony charmed all who met her. On that fateful night Miss Lehman slipped into the house so quickly that Mrs. Deisler did not have a good look at her. The next morning it was Tony who screamed when, going in to wake her mistress, she finds the latter stretched out on the floor. A dagger lay on the carpet near the dead woman's stiffened hand. The verdict of "suicide" was accepted by the public, as did Baron Wallroth, but his cousin, Thorn, a famous painter, arrives to make some investigations.

CHAPTER V.

WALTER THORN MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AT three o'clock on the afternoon of June 4 a cab containing two men drew up at the door of the Gray House in Salzburg, the house where Elise Lehman died.

The sun shone warmly on the gravel paths, but one of the men shivered as if in a chill. The other threw a sympathizing glance at him as he pulled the bell at the gate.

"I'm afraid coming here will be bad for you, Edmund," he said. "You're so excited already."

Wallroth shrugged his shoulders. "It would be too cowardly not to come," he answered somewhat brusquely.

Mrs. Deisler came down the path from the house. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?" she asked. Then without awaiting the answer she exclaimed, "Oh, it's the baron! Oh, my poor, dear sir—isn't it terrible?" She hastened to open the gate. "But I can't let you upstairs—the police commissioner has the keys."

"We have the keys with us," said Thorn, leading the way to the house. At the door he handed Mrs. Deisler the keys and they followed her up the broad stairway. The little window in the door of her own room was hung with a dainty curtain, which moved slightly, as if held aside by a cautious hand as the men passed up the stairs.

The housekeeper opened the door of the corner room, then retired and waited at the head of the stairs in case she should

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 8.

be needed. A door opened below, and Tony came out. She had been living in Mrs. Deisler's rooms since the catastrophe.

She stood at the foot of the stairs and called gently to the old woman. Tony's face was partly hidden in the white cloth that was wrapped about her head. She had been suffering from toothache since early that morning.

"Who's up there?" she whispered.

"The baron."

"There were two of them."

"The other gentleman seems to be a friend or maybe a relative."

"Oh, I see."

"Ain't you coming upstairs?"

"Why should I? They'll call me if they want me."

"What are you so excited about?"

"I'm not excited. But I'm glad the baron's come, so's I can get my money and go away."

"You could have gone away any time. I'd have sent the money to you." Tony murmured something that Mrs. Deisler didn't quite catch, then she returned to the kitchen.

The sun flooded the big, friendly room as the two men entered it, Wallroth last. His eyes wandered from point to point, with a touch of fear in them, as if he expected to see something gruesome. His heart drew itself together in the grip of an almost overwhelming grief. A deep groan forced its way from his lips. He pressed his hands to his temples and sank down on the nearest chair.

Thorn, whose robust nature had little sympathy with weakness in another man, tried to keep his voice gentle.

"You knew what awaited you here," he said quietly. "Why did you come if you felt you could not endure it?"

"It's so hideously incomprehensible," groaned Wallroth. "Here, where she lived, I feel more strongly than ever—what has gone out of my life. God—why did she do it? What could have driven her to such a step?"

"You may find the answer to that question in her desk. A letter that was not posted—or some message. She must have had something to tell you."

There was a long pause. Wallroth half rose, then sank down again. Finally he whispered in a tone that was half a sob:

"I can't do it—will you look?"

Thorn gave a sigh of impatience. "Very well," he said a bit sharply. "I'll look about here. But I advise you to go, and at once. It's only torturing you to stay, and you're no earthly good. Take the cab and drive to her grave. There's some sense in that—you owe it to her and to your love for her. Then go back to the hotel. I'll meet you there. Better do that, old man." His voice softened and he laid a gentle hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"Yes, yes—I will—this house is too dreadful." Wallroth raised his pain-drawn face into which a new look of horror came as his eyes fell on the dagger on the mantel-piece.

Thorn saw the direction of his look and stepped quickly between his cousin and the object of his horror. "Go now, dear boy—you must have loved her very deeply—and you've overestimated your own self-control." He passed his hand soothingly over the other's hair. Wallroth tried to pull himself together. He may have felt that he was behaving like an abject weakling.

"Yes, I'll go," he murmured hoarsely. "Don't laugh at me, Walter. All my longing, all my dreams of happiness centered in her. You know how little women meant to me—until this woman came into my life. I've lost everything—that's what upsets me so—don't laugh at me." It was like a moan of pain.

Thorn was alarmed. He felt a doubt as to the wisdom of leaving the excited man to himself. Still, it might be the best thing to do.

"Think of your mother now, Edmund," he said gravely. "When a man has a mother like yours he shouldn't say he has lost everything." He laid his arm over the other's shoulders and led him downstairs and out to the waiting cab. "Courage," he whispered as Edmund pressed his hand in farewell.

When Thorn entered the house again a simply clad woman with careworn face met him in the hall.

"You wish to speak to me?" he asked

as she stopped before him. "What can I do for you?"

"It's my wages, sir—would you tell the baron when he comes back?"

"He's not coming back."

"Oh—"

"But I can give you your money. You were in the dead lady's service?"

"I was her personal maid."

"How much is owing you?"

"Thirty crowns."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"But you should have something for the days you have been unemployed, through no fault of your own."

"I'm not asking anything for that, sir."

"That's your affair, my good girl. But I am sure my cousin would want you to have full justice. I am representing him here. Will another thirty crowns compensate you for the loss of time?"

"That is very generous; for I have another position waiting for me."

"I am glad to hear that. Will you stay in Salzburg?"

"No. I'm going traveling with my new lady."

She blushed deeply. "I wonder why?" thought Thorn. Then he realized that he had been staring at her with a deeper interest than the situation warranted. His excuse was that he had just discovered she was exceedingly pretty. It was more than mere prettiness, although her beauty had nothing showy or conspicuous about it. It lay in the pure oval of her face, in the well-cut features, and above all, in the expression of her lovely golden-brown eyes. But there were deep rings beneath those eyes, and a look of suffering in their clear depths. Her face was young, but its pallor made it look almost faded. Back of the evident suffering, mental and physical, which Thorn, with an artist's keen eye, read in that face, he saw marks of an unusual strength of character. Neither in body or mind could this young woman be classed with the average of human beings. She interested him and he lingered in the hall.

"You're going traveling? Are you sure you are strong enough? I know from some experiences of my own that ladies are even

more exacting when away from home. And besides, constant traveling is fatiguing."

He was talking against time, yielding to his wish to study her face.

But it was evidently not her wish that he should. "Oh, yes, I'm strong enough," she answered rather shortly, drawing back with a touch of stiff reserve that made him regret his rashly revealed interest. He said no more just then, took out the money and handed it to her. She thanked him politely, then turned toward the door of the housekeeper's room.

"One moment, please," he called after her. "Could you come upstairs after a while? I may want to ask you some questions about Miss Lehman before I report to my cousin."

"If you ring for me, sir, I will come up at once. The bell-button is to the right of the fireplace." Then she disappeared into the door.

"Have to handle her carefully, I see," thought Thorn as he mounted the stairs. "I suppose she has had unpleasant experiences with the male animal and doesn't trust any of us. Don't worry about me, Miss Touch-Me-Not. It's mighty easy to keep me away. And my intentions were strictly honorable. You looked so ill I felt sorry for you, that's all." He laughed lightly, for he had said the last words aloud.

Then he set about his duty of examining Elise Lehman's desk, in the hope of finding some word of explanation, some message for her lover that might throw light on her desperate deed. He had to pass the fireplace on his way to the desk. He stopped there, took up the dagger and looked at it thoughtfully. Then he went on and sat down at the desk. It was a big, old-fashioned "secretary," a handsome antique, with many drawers and pigeonholes. There was a miscellaneous assortment of objects on its top and writing shelves, a feminine confusion of things thrown or placed there by some one who had not even utilized the few useful articles in the mass. A pretty little daily calendar still bore the date of May 5 on its uppermost leaf. And beside it stood a bunch of dried violets in an absurd basket shaped like a boat.

The painter felt sorry for the poor flow-

ers. For their term of existence was evidently shortened by their sojourn in that unsuitable resting-place rather than in any of the many vases on desk or table. There was more such evidence on the desk to show Thorn that Elise Lehman possessed neither taste nor refinement.

Then he opened the drawer in which hung a little bunch of keys. It was the drawer in which Commissioner Sennfeld had placed the dead woman's jewelry and money. There were some sheets of paper there, closely covered with writing. Thorn took them out and began to study them. The lines on them had been written by a woman, but a woman who seldom handled a pen.

Thorn smiled involuntarily as he read the words. They were not the expression of original thought, but a mass of quotations, culled from many sources, and all pertaining to love.

He wondered whether Elise Lehman had compiled this list to assist her in writing her love letters, or to give herself the appearance of a cultivation she evidently did not possess. For her awkward handwriting and the many mistakes she had made, even in copying her quotations, proved that her education was of the most elementary sort.

Thorn was amused, and annoyed, too. He thought of his overrefined and ultra-sensitive cousin and rebelled against Edmund's infatuation for such a woman. He could hardly imagine that mere outward beauty would so hold a man of that type.

"Must have been because he knew so little about women," he murmured as he opened the other drawers, one after the other.

There was little to reward his search. A few memoranda of money spent, and a short letter to a dressmaker, written and then forgotten, showed the same childish unfinished handwriting. As the letter bore a signature Thorn knew that Elise had written the other notes as well.

She had left no word of any kind for her lover. But she had kept all his letters, carefully tied together, in a separate drawer.

During his search Thorn found an envelope containing several small photographs. When he saw that it contained no writing

he laid it aside until later, as his first desire was to find some message for Wallroth. Now, when he was sure there was no such message, he took up the envelope and shook out its contents.

When he held the first picture to the light he started and then puckered his lips for a low, long-drawn whistle, a habit of his at any sudden surprise.

This surprise must have been a bit startling. The blood shot up into Thorn's face and he rose hastily and paced the room for a few moments, so absorbed in his thoughts that he scarcely noticed when he ran foul of the furniture as he passed it. It took his some little time to come to himself again.

When he did, he looked about the room with a renewed interest, taking in its details more carefully. He went into the bedroom and looked about carefully there as well. Then he returned to the sitting-room, somewhat calmer, and rang for the maid. He sat down in the bay window to await her coming.

He did not have to wait long.

"Come this way, please," he said, as she halted by the door. "Why did you hurry so? You're quite out of breath."

"I didn't want to keep you waiting, sir," she answered with some little difficulty, as she sat on the chair he designated.

The chair had been placed so that any one occupying it would have been full in the sunlight streaming through the window. But as the girl sat down, she gave it a slight apparently involuntary push. When she was seated her face was in shadow. Thorn did not notice this. But he did notice how very becoming was the soft red light that fell on her face through the silken curtain.

She looked up at him in calm expectancy. "What do you wish, sir?"

"Some information you may be able to give me?"

"Yes."

"Were you in your lady's confidence?"

"No."

"How long were you in her service?"

"Not quite one month."

"Who had the place before you took it? Do you know this former maid? Could you tell me her name and where she is?"

"No. The lady was without a maid

when she engaged me. She took me on, while she was passing through Linz."

"I see. And you have no idea as to where—or how—your lady lived—before she became engaged to Baron Wallroth?"

"No. She did not tell me anything about herself. I hardly expected it. I'd have to be longer in a lady's service before she knew whether she could make a *confidante* of me."

"A lady—humph—did Miss Lehman impress you as being—a lady?"

"She dressed well."

"Was she refined?"

The maid shrugged her shoulders, but did not answer. There was a short pause. Thorn rose and the girl followed his example.

Then he asked another question, with a certain urgent insistence. "Please try to remember whether Miss Lehman ever said anything to you that would lead you to think she had been in Berlin not very long ago, or had appeared there in public?"

The girl pondered for some few minutes, then answered in the negative. She had come forward into the full light, and Thorn saw, with a start of pity, how dull her eyes were, how pale her cheeks. The girl must be really ill. He felt deeply sorry for her. But he still had need for her.

"Did your lady write many letters?" he asked.

"Not many—still she did write a few letters since I have been with her."

"Do you know to whom she wrote?"

"No. Miss Lehman always posted her own letters."

"And she received letters?"

"Yes. Many letters came from Baron Wallroth. But she received other letters too. She went to the General Delivery for them."

"Did she destroy those letters?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Had she many visitors, or friends hereabouts? You can imagine that Baron Wallroth is anxious to know what could have driven the lady to this desperate step. All my questions are for the purpose of trying to help him, to throw some light on the subject."

There was a short pause. A dash of color

came into the girl's cheeks and she timidly asked whether the lady had not written her fiancé some word of farewell. She may have thought it presuming to ask such a question, for her tone was hesitating and uncertain. She seemed surprised when she heard there had been no message.

"The lady had no visitors here in the house. A dressmaker, who came several times, was the only stranger who ever came here. I couldn't tell whether Miss Lehman ever met any one outside the house. She went out every day, generally during the forenoon, and usually alone."

"What was her mood? Cheerful?"

"No, she was frequently depressed and melancholy. I've seen her crying several times—particularly the last days. The very day she—killed herself—I urged her to go to the theater. I thought it might cheer her up. She did, and took me with her. We went to the theater frequently."

"How did she seem that evening?"

"Quiet and apathetic."

"What play did you see?"

"A farce called 'Charley's Aunt'."

"But that's very funny."

"Yes, sir. I laughed a lot, but my lady didn't seem to care about it. And she didn't say a word to me as we drove home."

Then the girl gave an account of the happenings of that night and the following morning. She spoke hastily, a bit feverish. Thorn listened attentively.

"Is there anything more I can do, sir?" she asked, when she had finished her story.

"No, my dear child."

"Then I can go?"

"Yes."

"I mean, I can leave Salzburg? My new lady is waiting for me in Munich."

"Certainly, you may leave whenever you like."

"Then I will go to-night."

"*Bon voyage*, and good luck to you."

"Thank you, sir." The girl bowed and went out. As she passed the fireplace Thorn saw her give a light shudder. He did not wonder at it. The dagger on the mantelpiece must have called up unpleasant memories.

He left the room himself shortly, locking it behind him. He went first to the police

station to give up the keys. The inspector in charge told him that Miss Lehman's step-brother, her only relative and heir, had been notified as soon as Baron Wallroth had given the police his address, and had wired that he would arrive in Salzburg in a day or two.

Thorn gave Wallroth the packet of his own letters when he met him at the hotel. But he did not show him the envelope with the photographs. He kept that in his own inner pocket.

Mrs. Deisler sat watching Tony as the latter was packing her few belongings.

"You are a bit vain, though," said the old woman, apropos of nothing.

"Why do you think so?" asked the girl with a laugh.

"When you went upstairs to that nice-looking gentleman you took off your bandage."

Tony did not answer, but bent over her bags with renewed energy.

CHAPTER VI.

WAS IT SUICIDE?

THE night train for Vienna leaves Salzburg station at eight fifty.

While Edmund Wallroth and Walter Thorne were making themselves comfortable in their reserved compartment, in anticipation of the long night journey, a woman came out from the waiting-room, glided down the platform in the shadow of a heavily laden baggage truck and slipped quickly in the corner of a third-class compartment further down the train. She wore a veil and had her coat collar turned up around her throat.

The elderly peasant woman who was the only other occupant of the compartment was asleep during the stop at Salzburg. When she awoke a little later the newcomer was curled up in her corner fast asleep, her face still hidden by the heavy veil and the coat collar. The old woman wondered at this, for it was a warm night. But she was not greatly interested and soon fell asleep again.

The two cousins did not sleep, although this was their second night on a train.

Wallroth was much calmer now. His visit to Elise's grave had quieted him. He could speak of her without the intensity of grief that had shaken him in the house at Salzburg. And he had a great desire to speak of her.

Edmund von Wallroth had never known the struggle with life's problems that steels other men's nerves and character. Frail from childhood, he was the petted son of a loving mother and a wealthy father. This was the first blow that fate had dealt him, and it was the harder because the first. He had no strength with which to meet it. He sunk himself in bitter-sweet memories of the woman who had won his love by storm and who had then robbed him of the awaited happiness in such cruel and incomprehensible manner. He talked on, half to himself, half to his cousin. Thorn listened patiently, even attentively, to the unhappy lover's memories of the dead woman's extraordinary beauty and charm. Wallroth spoke of her proud reserve and the noble gravity of her character, of how cold and haughty she was toward the men who crowded around her, of how well she could keep them at a distance.

At times, while he listened, an odd gleam came into Walter Thorn's eyes, an expression mingled with pity, scorn and anger. He turned his head so that Wallroth might not notice it. Finally, when Edmund paused, Thorn began to question him concerning the dead girl's short theatrical career. He asked where she had acted.

"Only in small theaters here and there," replied Wallroth. "She never got out of the provinces."

"But she was in Vienna? At the Carl Theater?"

"That was where she began. She was only in the chorus there. She sang small parts in the other towns."

"And yet as you describe her to me she would have created a sensation in some big city—Berlin for instance." Thorn threw out the casual suggestion. "She's never been there, you say?"

"No. It's only a certain sort of girl who can advance so quickly—the girl who is ready to pay for it. Elise was too proud for that."

It was some time before Thorn spoke again. He lit a cigar and persuaded Wallroth to do likewise. They smoked in silence as the train sped on through the night. Then Thorn knocked the ashes from his cigar with great deliberation, turned to Wallroth and looked him straight in the eye, saying: "Are you quite sure that it was suicide?"

Wallroth took the cigar out of his mouth. He stared at his cousin, rigid as an automaton, wide-eyed. Finally he murmured: "What—what do you mean—by that?"

Thorn continued calmly: "Haven't you thought how very improbable it is that a beautiful young woman should deliberately take her own life on the eve of a brilliant marriage? What you had to offer this girl was a chance she would not lightly throw away."

"Walter! I—give me time to think—No, that idea never came to me for a moment. Oh, it is too absurd! Who could have murdered her? And why? There was no robbery. Elise had no enemies who could hate her—enough to murder her."

"Love can murder as well as hate—scorned love can lead a weak mind into anything. You yourself know what it is to be jealous."

"Walter!"

"Yes, Edmund, we ought to give thought to this matter. The girl was very fair to look upon. She must have aroused love, passion, in other men. Is it so incredible that there might be one who would prefer to see her dead rather than in the arms of a rival? This neurasthenic generation cannot control its impulses as readily as did the men of a hardier age. And the morals of our time are rotten. How do you know that it might not have been hatred, paired with the desire for revenge, or jealousy made up of mingled hate and love that struck the dagger to this woman's heart?"

There was another long pause, during which Thorn studied his cousin closely.

Edmund's face mirrored the sad chaos of his thoughts. The doubt that had clouded his mind for a fleeting moment on the drive to Falsterbo must have returned now. He knew that there were years in Elise's life of which he had no knowledge other than

what she told him. Might there not have been experiences then, happenings that were the beginning of the tragic end?

His excitement drove him up from the seat. He walked to the window and stared into the darkness outside. Drops of cold sweat moistened his brow.

Suddenly a new thought seemed to come to him. He drew himself up to his full height, taking a long, deep breath. Something of the torture in his eyes seemed to fade out; a new calm took its place. He stopped in front of his cousin and laid his hand on Walter's shoulder.

"I ought to thank you for suggesting this," he began, quite calmly. "For it frees me from bitter thoughts. I was torturing myself with speculations as to why Elise should have done it."

"And did you come to any conclusion?"

Wallroth sighed deeply. "I could only imagine that she was sorry she had given me her promise—that she—feared this marriage. She took everything so seriously—I thought that perhaps—she did not love me and knew no other way out—but death."

It was Walter Thorn who looked out of the window now. He could not suppress a smile which he did not want his cousin to see. Controlling himself, he spoke.

"There are other ways of breaking an undesired engagement, other ways than suicide. Was Elise usually so eccentric in her behavior?"

"Oh no. She was calm and tactful, and hated anything sensational. She was very sensitive, too, and knew how she attracted attention everywhere. She was so particular that she wouldn't go to a little dance at the Artists' Club with me because we weren't married yet."

"I can understand that," said Thorn, this time quite unable to control a short laugh. Wallroth looked at him surprised and hurt. But Walter was serious again in a moment and continued: "All that speaks for my idea. No, Edmund; I do not believe this girl wanted to escape marriage with you. I do not think you need have any fear that she—did not love you enough to marry you." His voice took on a kinder note with the last words.

"But all the evidence pointed to suicide. The police and the coroner seemed sure of it."

"That's no reason why *we* should believe it. I think there should be an investigation made. I would hire a good detective, if I were you."

"You think I ought to do that?"

"Who else? The case is closed as far as the Salzburg police are concerned. They are not likely to go to any trouble to prove themselves mistaken. You are the only person interested in discovering the truth. Of course, there is Elise's stepbrother. But you've often said there was little love lost between them, and after all, he is only concerned with the actual fact that she is dead. Besides, he's a poor man with a wife and child dependent on him. You alone have an interest in why or how she died. You can free yourself from these torturing doubts if it is clearly proven that she did not die by her own hand. I do not believe that she did."

"But all this excitement! It will torture me so."

"Oh, come, be a man! But I am ready to attend to all that for you, if you prefer it. I am really anxious to prove that I am right. I will take up the case in your name if you wish it."

"Oh, do; please do! I couldn't rest, now, unless something were done. I wouldn't know a minute's peace if she *has* been murdered and I have not done all I could to bring the criminal to justice. Hire a detective, give him all the money he needs. Oh, God, when I think—"

"Don't think! Don't think of anything connected with it. You keep out of it from now on. The last days have upset you terribly. You had best join your mother in the country and keep as quiet as you can. I will stay here and report frequently."

"Thank you, thank you, Walter," said Wallroth. "Do whatever you think necessary."

The train pulled into Vienna early next morning. The two men drove to the Wallroth mansion, freshened themselves after their journey, and Thorn, at least, ate a hearty breakfast.

Then, leaving Edmund at home, he drove to police headquarters and had a long consultation with the chief of the secret service.

"Whom can you suggest?" said Thorn after he had put his case before the official. "I must have a man of the highest intelligence and the utmost discretion."

"There is no one filling that description who is at liberty in our service for the moment," said the chief. "But a private detective would do just as well. You might get Joseph Muller to take it."

"Muller?"

"Formerly our star detective," said the official. "He is retired, now; but still takes cases that interest him. If you can arouse his interest I can pledge you that you will have certainty one way or the other within a couple of weeks."

"You seem very sure of your man."

"You will be, too, when you see him at work. He's an odd chap, though. You must not be deceived by his kindly casual manner. He is the most unassuming elderly gentleman you can imagine, but a veritable human bloodhound once he is on the trail. And don't be surprised at anything you see in his house. His servants are all former jailbirds, and he gets more faithful service out of them than any of the rest of us do, no matter what we pay on good recommendations."

"You begin to interest me," said Thorn. "I sincerely hope I will get this Mr. Muller to take our case."

He set out again, stopping finally in front of a modest little villa in a suburban side street.

The door was opened by a young man of about twenty, whose dark eyes staring furtively from a white face almost startled the painter.

"That must be one of the jailbirds," thought Thorn. He asked whether Mr. Muller was at home. The lad murmured something and then shut the door again and went off through the vestibule. His oddly dragging uneven steps sounded weirdly through the stillness.

"Looks like a Russian, too," was Thorn's next thought.

The lad returned after some little time

and asked the visitor to come in. He led him first through a small square anteroom so lined with lockers and file cases that it was scarcely more than a narrow corridor. Then he opened the door at the farther end and Thorn found himself in a large, light, comfortable room. Both windows were open, and a slender elderly man was just shutting one of them. He motioned to the boy to finish it while he himself turned and came forward slowly to meet his guest. He pulled forward a chair beside a big desk for the stranger, and seated himself at the desk.

"Mr. Muller?" asked Thorn.

The man nodded, then spoke over his shoulder: "A bit quicker, Ossip. Oh, no, sir; you need not hurry," he said to his visitor. "I am at your disposal for"—here he looked at his watch—"for forty-six minutes. You may go, now, Ossip. Put out my gray jacket."

The secret service chief had cautioned Thorn that Muller was a very busy man, and that it was well to come to the heart of the matter one wanted to lay before him with as little loss of time as possible.

The painter took out his pocketbook and found a card on which the chief had written a few words. Another larger card slipped from his pocket. Thorn picked it up before handing his own card to Muller.

"This tells you who I am," he said. "And that the chief has sent me to you. We need a skilled man to take up our case at once. We have lost nearly a week, unfortunately. We should have started the investigation last Sunday morning."

"We?" queried the detective. "Then you are not the only person interested in this case?"

"No. It is really no affair of mine at all. I am here as agent for my cousin Baron—"

"Wallroth—Edmund Wallroth," cut in Muller quite calmly.

Thorn looked his surprise. "How did you know that?" he asked.

"You spoke of Sunday morning last, and—you have just come from Salzburg."

"How did you know that fact?" Thorn shook his head in astonishment.

"The card that fell from your pocket

was a card of the Nelbock Hotel. I know of but one such hotel, and that is in Salzburg. A man like yourself doesn't carry hotel cards about with him, so I took for granted that that card could not have been in your pocket long. You must have been in Salzburg recently."

"We left there last night."

"You and Baron Wallroth?"

"Yes. Still I do not understand."

"But I do. You want me to find out why Miss Lehman, who was found dead; stabbed, on Sunday morning last, should have taken her own life. Naturally Baron Wallroth, to whom the papers say she was engaged, would want to know why his fiancée preferred death to marriage with him."

"You are a mind-reader," said Thorn.

"No. Only an experienced detective with the imagination I need for my profession. You want me to make this investigation?"

"My cousin sends me to ask you to take up the case."

"I'm afraid it will not be possible. I am just looking into a forgery affair—a most interesting case."

"Is that the only reason you will not undertake ours?"

"You can understand that the more important case would interest me most, can't you? As you see, I am an old man. I undertake no case now that does not really interest me."

"Then I have come all the way from Salzburg in vain?"

"And by way of Sweden and Germany, too."

"You know that?" gasped Thorn.

"I take it for granted, as your pocket-book was full of Swedish and German notes."

"Your eyes are sharp."

"I need sharp eyes in my business. But it was an easy guess this time. Swedish and German paper money is easily recognized by its color. We've been talking for seventeen minutes, now," Muller added, taking out his watch.

But Walter Thorn was not easily discouraged.

"I have twenty-nine more minutes," he

said calmly, "and I'll wager that you will be ready to give twenty-nine hours or days or even weeks to our case, if necessary. For with all due respect to your forger friends, this affair seems to me more worthy a man of your ability."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because of something that is known only to me thus far—and will remain known only to me until you have looked into the case and found out a few things for yourself. I have come to ask you, not to find out why Miss Lehman died by her own hand, but to determine whether she did die by her own hand or not. I am convinced that she did not."

Muller looked more interested. "You do not think it was suicide?"

"No, I think it was murder. A murder from jealousy, possibly. That is for you to find out."

Muller sat bolt upright, now. "A murder," he murmured—"a human life cut down cruelly?" He sat absolutely silent for a few moments while Thorn watched him with great interest. It was so quiet in the room that the buzzing of a fly at the window sounded like the droning of a distant *aéroplane*.

"If it is a murder," Muller murmured, as if talking to himself, "I will find the murderer. He will be the ninety-fourth murderer whom I have brought to justice. The hundred will soon be full. And then I can rest, for I will have fulfilled my vow."

The emotion passed, and his features settled to their usual calm. He leaned back in his chair, remarking casually: "I'll have to begin in Salzburg, of course."

Thorn drew a deep breath of relief. This famous hunter of criminals had accepted the case. The mystery would soon be solved. "And soon," said Thorn to himself, "poor Edmund will know what he has lost in Elise. The knowledge will help heal his grief." Then he said aloud to Muller: "You may call on us for any amount you need."

He took out his pocketbook again, and laid ten hundred-crown bills on the table. Beside them he placed a thick envelope.

Muller took this up first, "Photographs!"

he exclaimed. Then examining the first picture carefully: "A beauty—yes—but not a lady!"

When he had studied another of the pictures he looked over at Thorn. "Is this Miss Elise Lehman?"

"Why, yes. Why didn't you guess it at once?" replied Thorn in surprise.

"For several reasons. First, on these two pictures the hair looks blond. Of course they're costume pictures, but I understood from the Salzburg paper that Miss Lehman was a brunette."

Thorn smiled. "She was. But when these pictures were taken she had the fad of powdering her hair."

"I see. And then this—this costume! It looks like those worn by the singers in cheap cabarets."

"Which is just what she was at that time. She was known as 'La Belle Elise,' and was the star of a third-class amusement hall in Berlin."

"And yet—she was to be Baroness Wallroth?"

"My cousin knew nothing about that period of her life. He believed her to be absolutely straight."

"That explains the engagement. I take it she was not—what he thought her."

Thorn smiled, and the detective smiled too, as his eyes rested on the pictures of the scantily clad beauty. "Had she any real talent?"

"She must have been a good actress in private life," answered Thorn with a shrug, "or my cousin would not have thought of marrying her. He is of sound mind."

"He must have been very much in love with her. Love can make the most sensible man foolish while it lasts."

"You're right. And besides, my cousin is not very strong, and has never taken much part in the usual amusements of men of his class. It was all the easier for him to fall into the toils of this sort of woman. Particularly as he knew her family, who were simple but respectable people."

"Yes. Only a case-hardened man of the world is fit to deal with these women. They can always drag the other sort down to any folly, or even to more. To murder, for instance," Muller continued after a

pause. "Still it may have been unpremeditated—a killing in a moment of passion."

Thorn started, then shut his lips tight. After a moment he opened them. "Yes, it might well have been accidental. A man goaded into anger by jealousy?"

"Yes, it might. And, for the moment at least, if it is such a case, my sympathies are on the side of the slayer." Muller turned the second picture over and looked at the reverse side. There were some words written there. "To my darling R—Umph! The pen sputtered, and she didn't send him the picture. Is this Miss Lehman's handwriting?" He held the card so that Thorn could see it.

"I think so. It looks like some of the writing I saw in her desk."

"Can you imagine who the 'darling R.' is?"

"No," replied Thorn; but Muller's keen ear had caught a slight hesitation. He let the matter drop, however, and turned to the railway guide always at hand on his desk.

"If I leave here at three thirty-five I can reach Linz at seven twenty-three. A local train from there will get me into Salzburg quarter past eleven. I usually wake about five, so that I can be on the spot at six."

"In the Gray House, you mean?"

"Yes. Who has the key, or at least the keys to the rooms where Miss Lehman lived?"

"They are still at the police station, unless her brother has taken them."

"She had a brother?"

"A stepbrother. He lives here."

"Has he been notified?"

"A wire went to him yesterday. Miss Lehman had not mentioned this brother to any of those who were around her these last weeks. The Salzburg police did not know of his existence until Baron Wallroth gave them his name and address. He is her only relative."

"What is his name and address?"

"His name is Hubert Lohr. He lives in the Thirteenth District, Red Hill Lane, No. 27. He may have started for Salzburg already."

"I hope not," said Muller. "For if

there are any clues at all they must be very slight or the police would have noticed them. This Mr. Lohr, if he pokes about in the rooms and removes her belongings, may destroy them altogether."

"Yes, it is likely. For unless Edmund's messenger found him still at home he doesn't know of this new development."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Muller, rising. "Do I report to the Baron or to you?"

"To me."

"And where can letters or telegrams reach you?"

Thorn was silent a moment. "Couldn't I go to Salzburg with you?" he asked finally.

"No, I prefer to work alone. But we can go to my former chief now. Does he know about the case?"

"Yes, you need only fetch your credentials. You don't want me in Salzburg?"

"No."

"In that case I shall be here till June 8. I am stopping with the Wallroths."

"And after June 8?"

"I shall be wandering about," answered Thorn evasively. "You can write or wire me to the Wallroth House. They will always know where I am."

Muller could not help smiling at this touch of mystery. Thorn saw it, and continued defiantly: "You know all I can tell you with a clear conscience. You must not think that I have any definite suspicion of any one—that I know anything about this case I haven't told you already."

"Did I say that I thought you did?" asked Muller with a smile.

"You seem to think something of the kind, even if you didn't say it," replied Thorn. "What gave me my first suspicion of what I believe to be the truth were these pictures. I had not met my cousin's fiancée. But this woman I had known at the time she was singing in the music hall in Berlin. I knew what her life was then, and I realized that she must have deceived Edmund as to its details. I realize also that such a girl must have known many men who paid court to her. Let any one of them take it a bit more seriously than she did, and we have a motive for this

act, particularly if it were committed in a moment of insane rage and jealousy."

"Yes, that is well thought out," said Muller after a pause. "I can handle this case alone, and I even promise you of my own free will not to do what I might so easily do—to find out where you go when you leave Vienna."

"What good would that do you?" said Thorn in a flash of annoyance.

"If I had you shadowed," replied Muller, "I could soon discover whether you have any particular person in mind. But don't worry; I shall not do this."

"May I take the pictures?" asked Thorn.

"If you want them. I have the photographer's name and address, and can get more if I need them."

"Where can I reach you to send you money?" asked the painter.

Muller named a Salzburg hotel, then pressed a button near his desk. The Russian lad came in in a few moments. "My traveling bag, raincoat, and tweeds," said Muller. The boy's face showed interest and a tense suspense.

"Well," asked Muller, "what is it?"

"Will you take me with you, sir?" asked the lad timidly.

Muller looked at him for a moment, then nodded.

Ossip slipped out of the door like a shadow, evidently delighted.

"Is that a confidential servant?" asked Thorn.

"He is my creature," replied Muller gravely. "I made a man of him again, and he is as devoted as a faithful dog." He held out his hand to the painter, who pressed it and then left the house.

Out in the clear sunshine again, Thorn felt as if he had emerged from another and a hitherto unknown world.

CHAPTER VII.

JOSEPH MULLER AND THE GRAY HOUSE.

THE young green of the willows and beeches sparkled in the early morning sun as Joseph Muller walked slowly along the riverside path that led out

to the Gray House. It was not yet six o'clock, and few people were stirring. All around him lay the quiet of early morning, the gentle sounds of nature's awakening, which were the veteran detective's best aids to constructive thinking. He stopped at an attractively placed bench and took out a clipping from a newspaper. As he read, he smiled at its flowery wording, the elaborate verbiage of the small-town editor.

"Mysterious Suicide," was the heading.

"The so-called 'Gray House' is the scene of this unexplained happening. The handsome old mansion in its charming garden behind the tall gray walls has an ill reputation in the popular mind. Rumors cluster around it, and in spite of its aristocratic appearance there is something sinister about the house chosen by a rich man for his future wife's present home. If the Gray House has had secrets to guard before this, it has now one secret more—a secret which will never be revealed, for the dead are silent—"

Again Muller smiled. "Yes, the dead are silent. But inanimate things talk louder than the average person knows. One must be able to understand their language, that's all. But yonder must be the Gray House." He walked on until he stood under the high walls.

A veritable fortress—may have been necessary when the house was built—it stood lonely then. But now, with the city so close, these forbidding walls do give an unpleasant air of mystery.

He walked around the house on the meadow path, then back to the streamside. The house looked more attractive here, for the wide gate revealed the garden at its prettiest.

Muller examined the big portal of elaborately wrought iron, a fine specimen of a craft which is rapidly passing into the discard in favor of cheap factory output. It was a gate easy to climb in spite of its height, for the pattern of thistles afforded many a foothold. In the right wing was a small gate for foot passengers. Its heavy lock was cleverly fashioned as part of the general design. "Big key needed for that," thought Muller.

Then he walked around to the front of

the house, which opened on a little street that ran out from the main avenue. It could hardly be called a street, for it went no farther than the big iron gate. The house was certainly sheltered from curious passers by. For with the exception of the footpath along the river, there was no road that led by the house. Few people who had no business there went by the Gray House.

Muller looked through the front gate. He saw an old woman come from the house with a basket of wet clothes, and turn off into the garden. A big dog came up and sniffed through the gate at the stranger, with a low, threatening growl. "Good watch dog," was Muller's further comment, pigeon holed in his own brain for future reference.

He made no further examination now, but returned to the town for breakfast. Then he went to the police station for a consultation with Commissioner Sennfeld, who seemed mildly surprised that the famous Joseph Muller should have come to Salzburg in connection with such a simple and clear case as the Lehman suicide. But he greeted Muller politely, and informed him that the dead girl's stepbrother had not yet arrived. Muller took the keys to the Gray House and asked that a constable be detailed to accompany him. He did not wish to be delayed by distrust on the part of the two caretakers at the mansion.

It was still early, not yet nine o'clock, when he and his escort rang the bell at the street gate. The dog was the first to greet them, barking loudly.

"Come back here, Pollux," called a gruff voice, as Buchner came up to investigate.

"Can I see Mrs. Deisler?" asked Muller. But that lady was already on her way to the gate. "My name is Joseph Muller," he continued, addressing the two servants. "The constable here will tell you that I have police permission to go into those upper rooms."

The constable nodded to the two, who looked surprised and not a little alarmed at this further invasion of their solitude. Buchner went back to his work. Mrs. Deisler shut the gate behind the retreating constable, then led Muller into the house.

"Are you a relative of the dead lady, sir?" she asked timidly.

"No; I am a detective," he replied.

"Detective? Is—is there—is there any more to find out—why she did it?"

"That's what I'm here for. And you would facilitate my work if you would not mention to any one that I am here—that there is a police investigation still going on."

"No indeed, sir," replied the caretaker, somewhat irritated. "The less said about the matter—and about the house itself—the better. People talk too much about this place."

"H-m! What do they say?" asked Muller, halting on the stairs. But the bell at the gate pealed loudly.

"That must be the baker," said Mrs. Deisler. "Shall I come back to you, sir? Will you need me?"

"No. I'll ring if I do."

"It's the last door on the right, sir—that's where it happened."

The old woman shuddered as she went off down the stairs.

Muller opened the door of the sitting room, which lay bright and attractive in the morning sun. The big, handsomely furnished room gave no hint of holding dread secrets. The air was close, as the windows had not been opened for several days.

Muller stood at the threshold, looking carefully around the room. The dagger on the mantelpiece and a few dark spots on the light-colored border of the big rug were all that revealed the tragedy which had taken place one short week before.

Muller moved forward to the big bay window and opened it. Then he stepped down off the raised platform and walked to the bedroom door, stopping at the spot where the body had been found. He had the police report in his pocket, and took it out now. The woman's head had rested on the threshold of the bedroom door, while her body lay stretched out, partly on the hardwood floor and partly on the rug of the sitting room. The dagger had lain near her hand, on the edge of the rug.

"On the edge?" repeated Muller. Then he bent to examine the carpet. He started once, and moved forward a bit, gazing at

the rug with keen attention. He rose, but still looked down at a certain spot of the intricate pattern, lost in deep thought.

"On the edge of the rug?" he said again, this time with a slightly scornful smile. Then he turned and went into the bedroom. This room, too, was immaculately neat. The bed had been opened for the night, but its usual occupant had not touched it. The pillow, and the coverlet, with its turned-back corner, lay smooth and unwrinkled.

The detective knew that the dead girl had been fully dressed when found. But she had taken off her hat, her feather boa, her gloves, and probably her cloak. She must have had a coat of some kind. The month had been cool for May, and Muller remembered that the 29th had been particularly disagreeable and stormy, at least in Vienna. He made a note to inquire as to temperature and weather in Salzburg on that day.

But it was safe to take for granted that a well-dressed woman would wear some outer covering over her light-blue silk dress when she went to the theater. He knew she had not worn a coat when found. The coat must be somewhere hereabouts.

He looked about the room, but saw only the big hat, the boa, and one long white glove, trailing out from under the hat where the latter lay as if carelessly flung down on a chair. Muller took up the hat. It was one of the largest decreed by the fashion of the moment. Three costly ostrich feathers hung from it, and a big veil of curiously spotted net, a hideous fashion fad. A rhinestone buckle held the feathers.

"She had money to spend, but little taste," thought Muller. "And she was careless with her things." One of the long feathers had been broken halfway of its stem by the force with which the hat was flung down. "Or else—her emotion of the moment made her careless—that might have been so. But—if she was so excited that she forgot a woman's natural instinctive care for a costly hat like this—why did she put her coat away? Why isn't that on some chair, as the other things are?"

A fan and a silk reticule lay on the chair under the hat. Muller opened the latter

at once. He had been struck by the fact that there was only one glove with the other things. Its companion might be in the bag. But the little trifle of light-blue silk contained only a delicate batiste handkerchief, a gilt *bonbonnière*, and a small folded opera glass in a case.

The detective started out on a search for that second glove, but it was nowhere to be found. What he did find, however, was a long hatpin with a big rhinestone head. It lay near the dagger on the mantelpiece.

The weapon did not interest Muller for the present. He was far more absorbed in the apparently unimportant fact that the hatpin was in the sitting room, while the hat lay in the bedroom. Of course, whoever found the dagger and laid it on the mantelpiece might have found the pin and placed it in its present resting place. But Muller took no chances as to the importance of any fact, however slight. He reserved judgment on this one until he could learn where both hat and pin had been when the body was discovered. The missing coat and second glove were factors of importance. He must find them; but there were other things to do first.

The old detective locked the door from the sitting room into the hall, and sat down at the desk. Before he touched anything he let his eyes wander over the meaningless jumble on its top and writing leaf. He too saw the calendar with its date of May 5, and the dried violets. He felt as Walter Thorn had felt about the woman who used this desk. Beautiful as she was, she had lacked refined taste and cultivation.

But the keen gray eyes that now passed slowly over the objects on the desk saw something Walter Thorn had not seen. The painter's eye had read human character, the veteran detective saw facts.

He looked at the calendar again, then took it up and turned it better toward the light. At the very bottom of the date leaf was a line of writing in pencil, the letters very small but still distinct.

"For the last time," was what was written there. And Muller knew that the calendar had been *purposely* left untouched after May 5. There was some significance

attached to this date for Elise Lehman, who may not have been quite so heartless as Thorn believed.

"Now, what was it that happened for the last time on May 5? Have these violets anything to do with it? H-m. What dates does a woman—such a woman—remember longest? A meeting with—or a parting from a lover? We are coming nearer the possible solution of this mystery. Find that lover—but there's more to do now."

And Muller continued his examination of the desk. There was nothing in any of the drawers but what was stated in the police report and in Walter Thorn's own narrative.

One wall of the bedroom was almost entirely taken up by a long built-in wardrobe with four doors. Muller next turned his attention to this.

The shelves behind the first door contained a few pieces of expensive silk lingerie, highly perfumed. On one shelf stood a lacquered box. The detective opened it with one of the small keys he had found in the opera bag. It contained only a fan, some pieces of lace, and a few bits of jewelry. But there were two keys on the string, and Muller set about looking for the lock that belonged to the other one. He found it on another shelf, under a pile of underwear, another smaller box.

This contained what he was seeking—letters, in a neat little package. He sat down by the window and began to read them. They were love letters, as he had expected—letters written by a man of only fair education and very commonplace point of view. But what the writer lacked in mentality he made up in passion, the crude passion of a lover who has found a response to his pleading. He was evidently the man in possession.

The writing was the round business hand taught in commercial schools, and some of the letters were scribbled on bits of paper in pencil. "Written on a train," murmured Muller. Others were on hotel paper of various towns. There were seven letters altogether, and all written within a year, the majority during the previous winter months. They were arranged by dates, and

the last interested Muller most. It was one of those scribbled in pencil and bore no date nor place.

MOUSEY DEAR:

Then you're really coming? At last! Am curious to hear what you have to tell me, but why must it be in Linz? I thought you were stopping with your brother. But, of course, I'll go anywhere to meet you, even to the end of the world. A few hours' train ride is mighty little trouble when it means being with you for a few days. Of course the firm might butt in and send me off in the opposite direction. But we'll hope for the best. I'll get there by hook or by crook. I'll have you in my arms on the 3rd at latest.

Your adoring,

GOLDIE-BOY.

Muller groaned at the cheap sentimentality of this signature, which was the same on all letters. There was no other name mentioned anywhere, and no envelope on any of the letters.

"Then she met her 'Goldie-Boy' on the 3rd. Must have been the 3rd of this May, of course. The last letter before that was dated April 19. Elise Lehman was already engaged to Baron Wallroth, for he took this house for her on May 1. It was evidently Goldie-Boy from whom she parted on May 5, and these violets were his last gift. There's one man located already, whom this marriage must have angered. I'll have to hunt this Goldie-Boy, for it does not look like a case of suicide."

Muller replaced the letters in the box, locked it, and put it on the shelf where he had found it. The middle door of the wardrobe was a big double door, behind which hung a number of gowns, negligees and blouses. The clothing was up-to-the-minute in mode and costly in material and fashioning. One thing surprised Muller—there were so many gowns of the same clear light blue. "Her favorite color, evidently, and an unusual one for a brunette. She must have had a very fair white skin."

There were at least four light-blue street gowns and several afternoon and evening toilettes of the same shade. The other garments, too, featured the same color.

One of the silk gowns, attractively trimmed with old-gold embroidery, was hanging half over the next, as if caught by

some hook. Muller put out his hand to straighten it, and in doing so caught a glimpse of spots on the front of the gown. He took it out and looked at it. There was a scattering of spots up the front of the skirt.

"Mud," he said, after an investigation. "Looks as if a passing carriage had spattered her. Careless maid she must have had, to put the dress away in such a condition."

The next compartment of the wardrobe contained orderly rows of shoes, and on shelves above gloves and other minor articles of wearing apparel. One pair of black shoes stood out of line, and the heel of one of them was thick with mud. "More carelessness," thought the detective. He took up the shoes. They were black patent-leather pumps, well cut, but rather large for a woman.

"This beauty had a big foot—there is usually some 'out' about them all; at least those with her antecedents. However, a large foot is no crime in a tall woman. But she wore her shoes too small." The leather of one of the pumps showed signs of strain over the ball of the foot. "Woman's vanity." And Muller went on to an examination of the big box of gloves. But the missing white glove, the mate of the single one that lay on the chair, was not there.

In the farther and last compartment were large boxes containing theatrical costumes, and, on hooks below the shelves, several coats and wraps. A long black cape, trimmed with fur and heavy braid, hung on the last hook, or rather half of it hung on the hook, the rest dragged on the floor as if the coat had been thrust in hastily by a careless hand.

"This was probably the coat she wore that evening. But why did she take the trouble to hang this up, even thus hastily, when she threw the other things about outside?"

The other rooms gave Muller no clues to add to his list. He went down the stairs slowly, noting the arrangement of the house. The wide and handsome staircase rose well back in a square hall which received its light from above and from a

big window over the front door. There was another door which stood open, separating the hall from a sort of vestibule into which the front door opened. There was glass above this door also. To the left was another smaller door, well back of the staircase.

Near it was a water tap. The key of the door was in the lock. Muller opened it, and saw that it gave out on a short paved walk, a few steps only in length, which led to the garden gate on the river side of the house. Just inside the door hung a large key, evidently the key to the gate outside.

Then Muller turned to the hall again, and saw that the door to the housekeeper's apartment opened to the right out of the vestibule.

"She could hardly hear any one going up or down stairs, unless her door were open." This was Muller's observation as he went toward the door at which Mrs. Deisler stood waiting.

"I thought you might be coming downstairs, and maybe couldn't find me," she said. "Do you need me now, sir?"

"Yes. I'd like to have a little talk with you."

"Come in, please." She led the way into the friendly room and placed a chair for him. She sat down at her sewing table herself.

"Now will you please tell me all you know about the case?"

Mrs. Deisler settled comfortably in her chair, as if she expected to enjoy herself. "Very well, sir. The two went out that afternoon—" she began.

"The two? Who was the other?"

"Why, that was Tony, her maid."

"Of course. I beg your pardon. Go on."

"They came home in a cab, after the theater, and went upstairs. The lady was in bad spirits and captious. She wouldn't let Tony help her undress. Tony came down here and we had a cup of tea together. The young lady rang for Tony to fetch her some drinking water. Then when Tony came back again we chatted a bit and went up to bed. I slept with Tony that night—it was a nasty night, and the

wind was howling around the place, and Tony was frightened."

"Yes?"

"Then, it must have been about seven next morning, I heard a dreadful scream; then Buchner shouted and came running in here, saying something must have happened upstairs. We ran up, and Tony was there, white as wax, and fell over into Buchner's arms just as he got there. When she came to she cried out that the young lady was dead."

"Yes—yes. Go on," said Muller, as the old woman halted in her report with a remniscent shudder.

Encouraged, she went on, told of the finding of the rigid body, and the other details of that morning.

Muller listened attentively. Then he rose.

"Come upstairs with me," he said.

When they reached the upper room he had Mrs. Deisler show him just where the body and the dagger had lain.

"Who put the dagger on the mantel-piece?"

"The doctor did that."

"Did he put this hatpin there too?"

"No; that was there before."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, sir—I wondered why the young lady hadn't put the second pin there too. She had such expensive hatpins they looked like jewelry; she took good care of them."

"Then she had a second one?"

"Oh, yes—you couldn't keep a big hat on without two, especially in such a storm."

"I see. Oh, there's another thing. Did you find a long white glove anywhere next morning? She might have lost it in the cab or on the way from the gate to the house."

"No, sir—I didn't find anything. But she couldn't ha' lost it between the house and the garden; she had enough to do to hold her hat on, and her boa up around her neck, in that wind. There'd been a sharp shower, too, and the path was wet, so she'd be careful about not dropping anything into the puddles. And if she'd dropped it in the cab I'd ha' seen it. I had to look for

Tony's bag, and I came up the path after the two of them. I'd ha' seen anything lying on the path."

"Yes—I suppose so. The young lady wore a cloak that evening, didn't she?"

"Why, yes, sir—it was cold and stormy. She had her long black cape on."

Muller went into the bedroom, motioning the woman to follow. He opened the wardrobe and showed her the cape.

"Is this the one?"

"Yes, sir; that's the cloak she wore."

The old woman's tone was definite.

The detective stood silent a moment, in thought.

"You said it had rained that evening?"

"Yes, sir; there was a sharp shower about ten o'clock, or maybe earlier. It stopped before the ladies came in, but the path was still wet. And it was awful windy."

"Yes, yes—that's of no importance."

Mrs. Deisler started to say something, but Muller continued: "What sort of a gown did she wear that evening? The papers said something about light-blue silk."

"Yes, sir—she always wore light blue. She looked mighty handsome in it, and she liked to have people call her 'the Lady in Blue.' It amused her to get so many light-blue dresses, and then have them all different. Tony told me."

"Was she as particular about shoes, too?"

"No, sir. But she generally wore those shiny black shoes, low ones; she had lots of pairs of them. Tony said they're the easiest to keep clean."

"Yes. Apropos this Tony—where is she now? Do you still see her?"

"No, sir—she's gone to Munich."

"Why to Munich?"

"Well, when the young lady died, Tony put an advertisement in the paper saying a trained lady's maid wanted a place. She is lucky, that girl. 'Twasn't two days later before some one sent for her to come to the Golden Horn Hotel, and when she came back she said it was a lady who was traveling around—a colonel's widow, a rich lady. She liked Tony and promised Tony she'd wait for her in Munich, where the lady was going next."

"Why didn't Tony go with the lady at once?"

"She wanted to stay for the funeral, and then the baron telegraphed he was coming, and Tony had to get her money from him. Maybe she needed it."

"What was the rest of her name?"

"Schreiner—Antonia Schreiner."

Muller wrote it down. Then: "How long had she been with the lady here?"

"Not quite four weeks. The lady hired her in Linz. Tony comes from Linz."

"H-m. Did she tell you a lot about herself?"

"No, sir—Tony wasn't talkative."

Muller pondered a bit. "How old would you say she was?"

"Oh, about twenty-five or twenty-six, I should say."

Muller nodded and dismissed Mrs. Deisler, asking her to send up the gardener. While alone he made a hasty search for the second hatpin, but could not find it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROSE WITH TWO STEMS.

WHEN Buchner arrived Muller had him tell his story and describe the position of the body. The old detective knew that the most intelligent and undeniably honest of eyewitnesses will vary in their statements as to any given fact. But his practiced mind could strike the average from a number of variations. Most of his witnesses here, however, agreed in fixing the position of the dagger as partly on the wood floor, partly on the carpet. It was the blade that had rested on the border of the carpet.

Then Muller asked whether the lady had been buried in the clothes she wore at the time of her death. Buchner thought so.

Alone again, Muller went into the bedroom and took another look at the spattered front of the light-blue silk gown trimmed with old-gold lace, and at the shoes with muddy heels. Then he left the place, locking all the doors behind him.

As he walked on into town he whistled softly to himself. Any one listening would

have recognized stray bars of the popular Radetzky March. And any one knowing the detective well would have also known that he was pleased about something.

Joseph Muller exhibited no great surprise when his inquiries at the Golden Horn Hotel brought forth the information that no lady answering the description of a "colonel's widow" had stopped at that house for months. Also that no lady traveling alone had arrived or departed during the first week in June. The entire force of servants was positive that no lady had engaged a maid, or that any girl looking for employment had come to the house during the days in question.

And there was no advertisement in the *Salzburg Gazette* that could in any way be construed as the one Antonio Schreiner claimed to have inserted.

Muller whistled slowly as he walked out of the newspaper office. Something was developing in this case that intrigued the veteran man-hunter and yet whetted his appetite for the chase. It looked as though it might turn out far more interesting even than Professor Thorn had seemed to think.

At the police station Muller authorized the sending of an official telegram to the Department of Records in Linz. The message asked whether any information could be given concerning Antonia Schreiner, servant, about twenty-six years old, who claimed to have come from Linz and to have been there from the end of April until the first week in May.

Then Muller went in search of Commissioner Sennfeld, whom he knew to be at headquarters on office duty for the day.

The commissioner looked up with eager interest as the old detective came in.

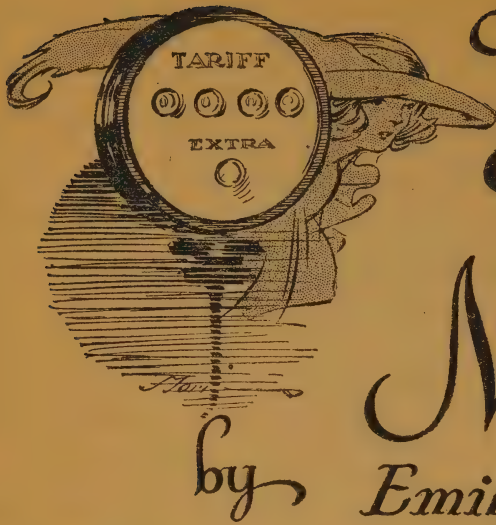
"Well?" he asked, with a gesture toward the chair in front of his desk.

"It may be necessary to exhume the body," said Muller, sitting down.

"But there was no doubt about the cause of death!" exclaimed the commissioner.

"Oh, no—there is no doubt about that," replied Muller calmly. "I'm not interested in examining the body at all. But I want to look at the shoes and the front and bottom of the skirt."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Thirty Cents More

by Emily Callaway

"SEE me after rehearsal, Miss—er—the third girl there in the second row."

Diana Cartier's heart gave a queer little thud. Hardly daring to look she turned her head quickly and counted again. Surely she had made a mistake. There must be three between her and the end of the row—there must.

But down in the bottom of her consciousness she knew she was the one the stage-manager wanted to see!

The chorus scattered about the stage to wait for its next number. Diana, painfully conscious of her bloomers, sank down in a distant corner.

"New at the business?"

One of the chorus men, carefully dusting off a bench, sat down beside her.

Diana pushed the damp curls back from her flushed face.

"I—I haven't done much in this particular line," she said. Her voice had a soft cadence to it that suggested the southlands and soft music on moonlit nights.

"Listen, kid." The chorus man nodded in friendly fashion. "Don't let any stage-manager put anything over on you. Go to it; don't be scared. Act like you didn't give a damn whether they like your dancing or not. You'll get just what you're looking for in this game." And he lighted a cigarette directly under the "No smoking" sign.

"Very kind of you to be interested," the

girl murmured. Diana Cartier had reached the point where even the sympathy of a chorus man was not to be despised. Hunger is a mighty leveler.

The stage-manager was rehearsing the principals in the climax of the play. Clearly it was not improving his temper. A blondined young person was struggling with the leading part—a French coquette. It was a wonderful opportunity which the young person was far from grasping. Her accent suggested Hoboken.

"She won't last. Third they've tried out," confided the chorus man.

Diana nodded absently. She was trying not to hear that painful French. For Diana was born in New Orleans, and had lisped baby French to her old Creole nurse before she'd spoken English. She longed to dash out on that stage, snatch the part, and show them how to play it.

For days she'd listened to every line. It was just such a part as she'd played once in a little Western stock company and it had been the seven days' wonder of the town. But that had been in Kansas, she reflected, and this was New York. And in New York she was only a chorus girl, a chorus girl shaking in her half-soled shoes for fear she wouldn't make good. She could imagine the amazement if she should suddenly demand the leading rôle.

"I hear they had a real French star for the part and at the last minute she threw

them," went on the oracle beside her, and then lapsed into silence as the playwright walked over in their direction.

It was the great Rollins Seldon. He had a record of twenty successes behind him; had never had a failure. Actors struggled to get in his companies. It meant a season's work.

Seldon apologized as he crossed in front of them and the girl drew in her breath sharply. Of course he hadn't recognized her—he'd never remember her.

It had been just a brief half-hour she'd met him, five years before. He had been the guest of honor at a ball in New Orleans, and Diana just one of the many buds who had come for a glimpse of him. But Diana had danced with him once, and with a joyful consciousness of power refused him a second, but far down in her gay little heart the memory of that dance still lingered.

Although she knew he'd never recognize the proud young beauty of New Orleans in this scared little chorus girl, still she trembled at his nearness. It was his first appearance at rehearsals.

"Regular fellow—Seldon," went on the chorus man, graciously conveying the impression to Diana that he dined with him at least three times a week. "Regular fellow and a darn safe bet when it comes to shows. I drew a breath when I landed in this. Been an awful season for the show business."

But the girl in the corner wasn't listening. Her brown eyes were watching Seldon. She saw a slight frown on his face as he listened to the lady from Hoboken. Then he took the stage-manager aside.

"They're beginning to weed things out for the opening."

Diana trembled.

"Weed things out for the opening." And the stage-manager had wanted to see her after rehearsal! Diana closed her eyes and a very earnest little prayer went up from that dark corner of the stage.

Then the chorus was called, and for the next half-hour Diana struggled as she never had before. Shielded by the front row, she worked on, trying to grasp the intricate step. She must succeed. She couldn't lose

this engagement. She had just twenty-eight dollars left in the whole world.

When an hour's recess was called for lunch, Diana, aching in every bone of her young body, a little faint from exhaustion, crossed to the stage-manager. She waited patiently while he gave directions to musicians and stage carpenters. At last he had finished.

"You—you wanted to see me," she faltered.

For a minute John McKernan looked blank.

"You said you wanted to see the third girl in the second row," she stammered. Her knees were shaking, the liquid voice trembled.

The light of comprehension dawned upon McKernan's face.

"Oh, yes; haven't had much experience, have you?"

"Not in the chorus," the girl faltered.

"Well, girlie, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you're not just right in the chorus. When Mr. Reilly himself looks it over in a few days he'll weed out the show, and it's kinder to tell you right now, girlie. Sorry."

For a minute the stage went black.

Twenty-eight dollars.

"But I—I've got to have the engagement. I—I need it. I'll work so hard, and I've been rehearsing a whole week. Please give me another chance."

Diana scarcely recognized her own voice, Diana Cartier begging for work!

But McKernan only shrugged.

"Lots more need it, too. You don't act like you'd ever been in a chorus before. Haven't got time to teach dancing, girlie. Sorry." And he hurried off.

Diana turned away.

Somehow she got into her shabby little street suit. The chatter of the other chorus girls sounded miles away. She pulled her hat far down over her eyes. The tears might come in spite of her. Not that anybody would notice or care if they did.

She stumbled down the stage alley. Perhaps if she got some lunch she wouldn't be so faint.

Rollins Seldon, lifting his hat courteously as he passed her, hurried into his waiting limousine.

Her own kind, a man who had pleaded in vain for a second dance, and now she stood a little shivering, friendless figure, watching his car roll away! Not even good enough for the chorus of his company!

This time the hot tears welled up. She pulled her hat still farther down and started down the street.

Where should she go—what should she do? She mustn't cry, whatever she did, she mustn't cry.

"Seems to be going your way, too," said a voice just behind her, and to Diana's consternation the voluble chorus man fell into step beside her.

He mustn't guess. She felt that the pity of a chorus man was more than she could stand just then.

So, being an excellent actress, she managed a weak little smile. She couldn't trust herself to speak. However, that defect didn't trouble the chorus man. He began just where he'd left off.

"I hear that lead will be fired. Gee, what a chance for some dame who could look like a million dollars and *parley-vous* a bit. You girls certainly get all the chances in this profession."

As at that particular moment the only chance in sight for Diana seemed to be a process of slow starvation, she decided to change the subject. She couldn't abruptly leave him in the middle of the block.

"How do the chorus girls manage to get their lovely clothes?"

How calm her voice sounded. No danger of crying now.

The oracle beside her again burst forth. Apparently his knowledge was limitless.

"Lots of 'em buy their clothes for a song from the management when a show closes. And when a show closes after just a few weeks, the clothes is as good as new."

"I see."

Diana felt called upon to say something. He was trying to be friendly, and friends were scarce just now.

"You see, I've only played in stock and dramatic productions. This is my first experience—in the chorus."

"I know how it is, girly. This season we take anything we can get." His fishlike countenance gleamed with understanding.

"Say, sister, I'll give you a tip. Two of the Colling musical shows have just closed, and they had some flossy clothes. Mrs. Ernestine, the wardrobe mistress, is a personal friend of mine. Just say you know me, and she'll give you the pick of the rarest gems she's got in the place."

"How nice of you," Diana managed to murmur, but the chorus man was extracting a card and writing thereon some magic symbols.

"You show her that, and believe me, kid, flossy clothes make a heap of difference."

Just at that moment, as she grasped the outstretched card, Diana got her great idea. For a second she stood perfectly still, letting it sink in. That chorus man would never know what he'd done for her.

And then she held out her hand, impulsively.

"Thank you so much. It's awfully good of you. I—I won't keep you any longer; you've only an hour for lunch and I—I've an errand."

Abruptly she turned and fairly fled into the friendly protection of a department store. Up to the quiet of the waiting-room, she rushed, clutching the precious card and her great idea. An unoccupied chair in a corner was quickly turned to the window, and she was comparatively alone. She must think—no time for tears now.

Would she dare? Would she? And why not? She had nothing whatever to lose. Her job was gone, no one in New York knew her, and she could hardly have less money than she had now. There seemed to be everything to gain—and all it needed was nerve, a steady nerve.

The chorus man was sure they would change the leading woman. And she—Diana—could talk French like a native. She was dark, her great brown eyes might have come from Provence itself. Why couldn't she walk into Reilly's office, be a Frenchwoman and get that lead? Once she got it she knew she could "eat it up."

The big clock in the waiting room said twenty minutes to three. She looked down at the worn little blue serge. Of course that would never do. They mustn't recognize the little discharged chorus girl. And she knew that the scanty wardrobe trunk

back in her tiny room didn't hold a dress that was fit to be seen on the street. She had combed it through too many times.

But that chorus man, bless him—yellow spats and all—had given her the entrée to the elect. Diana Cartier had never worn discarded clothes in her life. Now they seemed sent direct from heaven. Again she looked at the clock. She mustn't wait a second or her courage would ooze out.

Feeling as her great grandfather must have felt when he led the Southern troops into battle, she struggled to her feet. Quarter to three!

Fortified by a malted milk of peculiar excellence, she proceeded to the Colling Theater. Fortune seemed to be smiling, Mme. Ernestine had just returned from a most nourishing luncheon. At sight of the magic card, she greeted Diana with open arms. Apparently the chorus man had not overrated his influence. Luckily again the clothes from the two failures had not yet been turned over to the second-hand men.

For ten of Diana's precious dollars she had the pick of two rooms full.

And Diana never faltered. At quarter to four Diana Cartier, in her little blue suit, with a huge box under her arm, mounted the three flights of stairs to her own tiny room. At exactly quarter past four a glorious vision stole noiselessly down those same stairs again. Diana's slim figure swayed in a gorgeous gray and gold Paquin. A chinchilla collar was high about her neck, a gold walking stick in her hand. Her dark hair was plastered tightly to her tiny head, black earrings brought out the French pallor of her skin. Her lips were carmine, her eyes a velvety black. A close black velvety toque with a huge imitation paradise sweeping from it, completed the picture. The chorus man would never have dreamed that he'd ever laid eyes on this glorious creature before.

With the clothes, Diana herself had changed. She felt like a Parisian star. This was a part—Diana Cartier had vanished—Mme. Adorée, the Paris sensation, had taken her place.

Luckily the theater was only three blocks away. A taxicab would not be prohibitory. And how it would add to the picture.

She had risked so much—she decided to be really sporty and throw in thirty cents more. She'd be a regular gambler. Besides, the thought of walking down Broadway as Mme. Adorée was a little too much for Diana Cartier.

And so it came to pass that exactly three hours after a discharged little chorus girl had crept away from the stage entrance of Reilly's Theater a radiant French star descended from her taxicab at the front entrance. A theater attendant jumped to open the door.

"M. Reilly's Theater?" asked the Parisian accent as the man carefully opened another door. This was evidently some pumpkin!

"I jus' arrive from Paris," Diana mentally added Kentucky; she had played a one-night stand there. "Zis morning—Aquitania—I am to zee M. Reilly immediately."

"Yes, ma'am." And almost backing before her the carriage man showed her into a waiting elevator. Then he rushed to the speaking-tube and called upstairs to the great Reilly's office boy:

"Say, Nolan, on your toes. Some big French star is coming up in the elevator. Just got in on the Aquitania. Came in taxicab. Must be some rush. Reilly going to star her in the new play?"

Diana's thirty-cent taxi fare was proving a good investment.

And Johnny Nolan, at the other end of the speaking-tube pricked up his ears.

"So the French star's arrived. Sure, send her up and get a hustle on. I know all about her."

Nobody was going to give Johnny Nolan any information. It was evidently up to him to know all about this French Jane, whoever she was.

So Johnny proceeded to clear a gangway through the crowded room to the elevator. As Diana emerged from the elevator, Johnny Nolan fairly flew over the intervening space. No one knew better than he how to squelch the aspiring actor and to protect Reilly's sacred presence, and no one how better to approach a star. Clearly this was an occasion.

As Diana paused, sweeping the room with

her lorgnette, as though uncertain which way to go, Johnny had reached her.

"Is Mr. Reilly expecting you, *madame*?"

His freckles fairly shone in his earnestness. He'd nearly lost his job once because he mistook a very big playwright for a seedy actor and treated him accordingly. He wasn't going to make any more mistakes.

"You funny little boy—M. Reilly—he expect—me? How you mean—expect me? You do not know who I am—no—Mme. Adorée—and then a torrent of French.

Before it Johnny Nolan withered; the other occupants of the room seemed to shrivel against the walls. And Diana began to enjoy herself.

"Excuse me, ma'am, Mr. Reilly's expecting you—this way." And in a second the sacred inner gate swung open.

Diana thought of the hours she had waited on the other side to get that chorus girl engagement. She distinctly remembered Johnny Nolan's manner on that occasion. Needless to say, it was not as to-day. Such is the power of suggestion—and clothes—and a taxicab.

And Mme. Adorée, trembling inwardly, and praying that her knees wouldn't make a loud report if they knocked together, followed him into the inner reception room.

"Ah, how funny in zees America. So zees is ze office of M. Reilly, zey say on ze Aquitania as we come up ze harbor—but, no—hurry, hurry, I have not yet ze hotel." And Johnny hurried.

He almost ran into the august presence.

"Excuse me, Mr. Reilly, but it's some big French star, Mr. Reilly. Every one knows who she is—Mme.—eh—Andr'ee or Adray or something, I didn't dare ask her."

Reilly took his feet off the desk.

"Outside, is she?"

"Yes, sir, in the private waiting room. Got in on the Aquitania this morning, sir. Came right here. Hasn't even got a hotel yet."

Reilly nodded understandingly.

Nobody could tell him anything, either. He didn't know a French star from a Turkish one, but that was neither here nor there.

"What you keeping her waiting for?"

Johnny Nolan fairly tumbled out of the presence. A second later he was bowing Diana through the door.

And then Mme. Adorée made an entrance. It covered up the trembling of her knees.

Her clinging gown swept the floor. Her lorgnette swept the room. Every inch of her was Parisienne.

Reilly rose from his chair. His secretary almost backed from the room. The stage was set.

"Zo—zis is ze great American manager's office—and zis—ze great American manager himself."

Reilly beamed.

"Won't you sit down, *madame*?"

"Sh!" Diana's fingers were at her lips. "I am incognito, you understand, *mon-sieur*, ze mystery, I run away from my Paris. I here—will be Mme. Adorée, *n'est ce pas*?"

Diana's accent was perfect. It would have deceived a far keener critic than Reilly. She was playing a part. And all nervousness had vanished.

"Mme. Adorée, *n'est ce pas*?" she repeated, and Reilly nodded comprehendingly. Evidently he should have recognized her. Any one with half an eye could see she was a personage, and Reilly was prostrate before prosperity. It was his god.

He carefully seated her in the most expensive chair in his expensive office. He seated himself opposite her, as though the rest of the day were hers. This was an occasion.

Diana, having carefully inspected the room, took out a tiny powder-puff and industriously powdered her nose. Then she leisurely turned to the business in hand, her poise perfect.

"M. le Manager, I sink jus' for fun, maybe *peut être*—I play a part in America. I hear on ze boat zat you have a new play." Reilly eagerly interrupted her.

"A glorious part for you, a French coquette."

"Ah, but I nevair promise nosing, I might not like ze part, it may not be beeg enough." And Diana shrugged her shoulders. But the fat little manager was leaning forward eagerly.

"It's a great part. We wanted a French star, *madame*. You must read it. It was made for you and with the advertising of your name," Diana gasped inwardly. Her name! She rose temperamentally and swept around the room.

"*Et bien—non—I do not play ze part.*"

"Not play it—why not?" Evidently Reilly was not used to handling foreign stars. His fat face was flushed with anxiety.

"Well, *monsieur*, I run away from Paris, my Paris, public.

"No one must know—jus'—Mme. Adorée, and zen you say my name." And with a shrug she proceeded to light a cigarette.

"Well." Reilly remembered the Hoboken accent now struggling with the part. "If you insist, of course I can't feature you, but *madame*, you must go to rehearsal, you must consider it."

He touched a bell.

"Jackson, the lead in the new show, the part, quick."

Diana fanned herself with a magazine. Could this be true. He hadn't even asked a single question. Just accepted her at her own calculation! Just given her what she was looking for!

She remembered the chorus man.

"You get just what you're looking for in this business." She seemed to be getting it. And she knew she could make good. He wouldn't lose anything by it. But she mustn't be eager. That would never do.

"I make no promises. Some parts, I nevaire play. Not even for you, *monsieur*."

"But nobody'd turn this down. It's a great part."

"Zo zey all zay, zes managers who wish for me to play zer plays."

A vision of the long line of waiting managers who had fought for her services almost proved too much for Diana. She hastily changed the subject.

"And zen, of course—my salary."

Reilly looked distinctly worried.

"What will you take? Without your name, of course, it will make a big difference."

Diana considered. Her last part had paid twenty-five dollars a week.

"*Monsieur*, I might—zo you—you prom-

ise nevaire to zay my name; play, well five hundred a week."

Reilly actually looked relieved. But he hastily corrected any such impression.

"You'll break me, you'll break me, but I guess we can come to an understanding."

Diana's longing to hug that little fat manager was so imperative that she was afraid she couldn't control herself. Five hundred a week! Five hundred! It couldn't be really true. Something would surely happen. She'd wake up in a minute.

And then Rollins Seldon was announced.

"Rollins Seldon!" Diana's heart gave a queer little leap.

Reilly, carefully excusing himself, joined Seldon in an outer room. Evidently he wanted to prepare him for his find.

And Diana hastily scrutinized her make-up. It was still perfect. Although a little more carmine would help the lips. So far she'd succeeded. Succeeded past her wildest hopes. She must keep it up—she must. Rollins Seldon must never know he'd laid eyes on her before, let alone pleaded for a second dance.

She walked around the room. It might still the loud beating of her heart. Then she decided that sitting was easier. She sank back again into the luxurious chair and again studied herself in her tiny mirror. It showed her Rollins Seldon just entering the door.

"Mme. Adorée."

He was bowing low before her. He didn't offer to touch her hand—Diana inwardly thanked her stars for that.

"I'll have to introduce myself—Mr. Reilly is getting things fixed up on the stage. I'm Rollins Seldon, the playwright."

And Mme. Adorée bowed her head. How keenly he was looking her over! She remembered at the New Orleans ball that he'd whispered he'd never forget her eyes. Would he?

Braving the worst Diana looked him squarely in the face. Then she burst into a torrent of French. At least, it would take his attention off her eyes.

But Rollins Seldon didn't seem to hear her. He was staring at her in a manner not quite compatible with his well-known courtesy.

"Have I seen you before—of course I must have—in Paris. I have the reputation, *madame*, that I never forget a face."

But Diana didn't appear to be interested.

"Have not all ze world seen me—in Paris?"

"Now I wonder—just what plays—" But Diana had interrupted him.

This would never do, he mustn't pin her down to names and dates. She must have that part, she must read it just once—then she was sure they'd never take it from her, no matter who she was.

"*Monsieur*, have you a cigarette—I die—I, how you say—I perish—" And again she explained it all in French. It filled up time.

Seldon gravely offered his cigarette-case. Diana's hand was trembling horribly as she took one out. She wondered if he noticed; those keen eyes seemed to be looking straight through her. Clearly taking that cigarette had been an error.

"Ze part—it is—how you say—good?" Diana didn't look at him—she puffed leisurely at the cigarette. If only she could make him talk anything—anything—until the part was in her hands.

"It is very good."

Then he walked across the room and looked out of the window. Why was he looking out of the window? Was there a policeman in sight?

"Mr. Reilly says you got in on the Aquitania this morning."

Was he just making conversation until the policeman had time to get up and grab her? She must get back to her part, to Mme. Adorée; she must. If only her heart weren't beating so wildly.

"Ah—how rough—ze weazer—ze sea—" And again she broke into a torrent of French. At least that wasn't Hoboken accent.

Her eyes fell on a newspaper on the desk. To-day's paper. Casually Diana picked it up—and her eye lighted on "Shipping News." The word "Aquitania" seemed to rise up and smite her in the face. She began feeling faint.

Aquitania detained in New York by a broken engine. Did not sail for London yesterday as scheduled.

And she had glibly asserted that she had arrived on the Aquitania this morning! Had any one seen that paper?

Clearly Reilly had not. Oh, why had she mentioned the boat—why had she?

"Where have I seen you before?"

Like a shot from a gun came the question. The gray eyes opposite her seemed to be boring into her very soul.

"It wasn't Paris—I know my Paris."

What should she say? If only he wouldn't look at her like that. Quickly she looked away—she must rally her forces—she must do something—none of her fighting ancestors had given up.

"*Monsieur*—ze last time you zee me—you say—nevaire will you forget *ues yeux*—nevaire and now—you see—you have forgot."

Clearly Rollins Seldon hadn't expected this. So she'd expected to be remembered!

"Mme. Adorée—*non*—it is not my real name, but for a part in America—it will do—*n'est ce pas*? But you, *monsieur*—you have forgot."

Then Diana rose to her feet. Gracefully she glided across the room. The beautiful lines of the gown clung alluringly to her slim figure. Every poise of her was French.

And the playwright's eyes never left her.

At this moment the great Reilly literally burst into the room.

Never had Diana been so glad to see any one—she wanted to embrace the red little Irishman. No doubt was in his face—just complete satisfaction—and in his hand a large, fat part.

"Everything straightened out, ma'am, down on the stage. The chorus is dismissed for the day, the leading lady is fired and the principals are waiting to run through the play with you."

"How sweet—how wonderful—how queek is you—great American manager," cooed Diana's silky voice.

"Mr. Reilly—may I—"

It was Seldon's voice—but Diana had heard him before Reilly did. It was war to the end. With a quick laugh she clung to Reilly's arm.

"You take me down—now—zis minute, I'm so—afraid—all ze newness—ze new American manager—you come wiz me."

And beaming from ear to ear Reilly proceeded through the door with Diana clinging on his arm.

Her chatter never ceased for a moment. She shot one look back over her shoulder. Rollins Seldon was gravely following them out of the office. He'd have no private word with that fat Reilly if Diana's American brain could help it. The little elevator was waiting for them. Johnny Nolan fairly strewed the intervening space with roses. The boss himself, the big playwright and a star all going through his gate at once. It was almost more than he could engineer.

Diana playfully pulled Reilly into the elevator with her.

"Mr. Seldon—he have to wait—*N'est ce pas?* It's how you say—ze bad luck for three to enter ze elevator togezer. Just you and I—*N'est ce pas?*"

And nothing loath, the great Reilly laughed.

"Come down, Seldon, when you've nothing else to do."

And the elevator door closed with Seldon left behind. Diana breathed a sigh of relief. She had three minutes' start, and the part was in her hands.

"M. Reilly, I am—how you say—very nervous—very•temperamental—it's only to please you—I rehearse zo soon—only for you—would you sit right on ze stage and, please; oh, please not talk to no one—jus'till I do ze first act—zen I am myself—jus'to feel—my friend, he sit beside me—he watch my work—he not tell to any one, 'Oh, she good—or oh, she bad.' " Appealingly Diana's brown eyes looked into Reilly's blinking one.

Clearly Reilly was hers to command.

"Now, don't you get nervous. You're my star and what you say goes—I'll just sit right in the wings and never take my eyes off you and kill anybody that speaks to me."

"Ah—you are ze angel."

And the elevator boy never winked an eyelash. But his tale later to the assembled office force of how the new French Jane vamped the old man in the elevator lost nothing in the telling.

If the stage-manager had any doubts as to the arrival of a star they vanished

when Mme. Adorée swept across the stage with Reilly in close attendance.

"I wish to be—how you say—quick—I am fatigued. I run over ze part now—*n'est ce pas?*"

"Of course, *madame*; of course."

No hint of recognition was in his eye. Luckily the chorus manager and the chorus had departed. That danger was gone and this manager had probably never once glanced at the small be-bloomered chorus girl. Diana drew another breath. Seldon had not yet appeared.

"We'll jump right to your opening, *madame*. See—a garden, you enter here."

"I zee—I zee—assez, *monsieur*, I work out my own character, *monsieur*." And working against time Diana made her entrance.

She had watched the part for a week; she knew every line, every motion. For the first time that part was played. The stage-manager held his breath. Reilly, seated on a small stool never took his eyes off her. As an office boy approached him with a message he shook his fist at him. The office boy faded into oblivion.

Luckily the part had a very showy entrance. It gave Diana a chance to show what she could do in the opening speech. And in the midst of it Rollins Seldon came in.

Out of the corner of her eye Diana saw him standing quietly in the wings. And she was glad he was standing there.

What did it matter who she was? She was having her chance, showing them how a French star should be acted. They couldn't deny her ability.

Straight through the act she went. Memories of the poor little Hoboken accent vanished.

Reilly was beaming, the stage-manager jubilant, and at the final speech the whole little company applauded. It was the artists' quick recognition of talent. They have always tribute for real art.

"*Madame*, your name must be in electric lights; you have saved the play."

It was Reilly—nothing would be too good for his new-found star.

And then it was that the playwright spoke.

"It is plain that *madame* will make my play—may I not see you to your hotel? *Madame*—my car is outside."

Quite gravely Diana nodded. She was in a daze. Reilly's secretary was thrusting a contract into her hand. Her head began to swim. She must keep up—it was nearly over. She must get out into the air.

Just how it all happened she was never quite sure. But a few minutes later Rollins Seldon was arranging the pillows for her in his own luxurious limousine. She faintly heard him direct his chauffeur to drive slowly to the Ritz.

"So you put it over, you clever little lady."

Something of amusement in his voice brought Diana's senses back.

Wide open went the brown eyes as they gazed anxiously into the gray ones.

"Don't be alarmed. But why did you pick the Aquitania to come on this morning?"

With a little moan Diana's eyes closed. Her lips began to quiver. She couldn't fight any more. She couldn't. The reaction had come; she just wanted to put her head down on that broad shoulder and cry her eyes out.

And then the wretch began to laugh—he actually thought it was funny.

"You see—I went down to see some friends off for Europe yesterday on the Aquitania when she was detained—so I knew she couldn't have arrived this morning.

"I've been thinking pretty hard, little girl, all through that stunning rehearsal you gave. I've seen you before—liked you very much. Wasn't it down in New Orleans?"

And Diana could only nod. She couldn't even look at him.

"You were the belle of the party and

wouldn't give me a second dance. What—are you doing up here—masquerading?"

And piece by piece he got the story. Diana glided over the loss of fortune, the necessity for work. But Rollins Seldon read between the lines.

The car was stopping at the Ritz. Diana gasped. It was the last straw.

"Oh, I—I'm just a joke. I couldn't stay here. I—I haven't the money. I live in the dingiest place. Please—take me there—and take the part—I—I'll never trouble you any more."

But the great playwright was patting her hand.

"Of course you're going to live here. We'll arrange that—all French stars have to."

"You mean—I—I'm to keep the part?"

A flushed little face looked up into his. Two red lips trembled.

And Rollins Seldon nodded.

"Of course. No one but you and I know the secret. Do you think Reilly would ever forgive me if you turned up missing now? We'll drive over to your place. You can pack up and move over to the Ritz to-morrow."

And Diana quietly pinched herself. Could it be Diana Cartier that this was happening to?

As he carefully escorted her up the steps of her own shabby rooming-house he caught a glimpse of tears again in those brown eyes.

"May I claim that other dance some day, very, very soon?" he whispered.

Again Diana couldn't trust herself to speak. She just nodded and then fled into the house and up the three creaky flights of stairs. It wasn't of her coming triumph she was thinking strangely enough. It was of that promised dance with Rollins Seldon.



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The Tiger Trail

Part III

by Edison Marshall

Author of "Shepherds of the Wild," "The Voice of the Pack," etc.

CHAPTER XI.

FLOODTIDE.

"DOES it mean anything to you?" Ernest asked me.

"Nothing whatever—any more than the rest of this devilish mystery means. Do you suspect—that Ahmad Das is perpetrating something?"

"I suspect nothing. I only want you to recall a few little points that will undoubtedly be a great source of pleasure to you." He spoke with a grim humor. "You must have heard stories—every man has—of men shooting at hyenas in Africa, wounding them, tracing them to the huts of the natives, and then finding—not a hyena—but a black man, dying, with a bullet in him."

"I've heard the stories, and they don't make good sense."

"A hundred men, wiser than you and I, swear to them. We're young men, Long. I'm a lot younger than you. But this world is too big and too old for any man to know all that's in it. You and I don't want to seem too wise, or say that anything—*anything, man*—can't be so. It never pays to be too sure. They say that by the witchcraft of Africa that no white man can un-

derstand—that sometimes those niggers keep their own shape, and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they creep through the jungles, not as men—but as something else—something that walks on four legs. There are other similar stories in India—even in our own North."

"But it isn't quite clear yet."

"I think you are trying to be abstruse. And maybe you haven't heard of the theory of the transmigration of souls?"

"Every man of education has heard it," I replied.

"If you have, just remember these little points. One of them is that the transmigration of souls—that the soul of an animal can live again in the body of a man—is a rather current belief in India. Ahmad Das is of Hindu blood. And he was born at the same hour that my father's tiger was killed."

He laughed grimly, and gave me a cigarette. Then we walked out into the hall.

Ernest and I found the elder Hayward in the library. He stood shivering before the faint coals that had been the fire. All of us leaped when the front door opened.

It was Southley, and he carried a lantern. His clothes were simply drenched.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 1.

He wore no hat, and his white hair was stringing about his worn face, and the water poured from him. His wet face glistened in the candle-light.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Just a little midnight session," his son answered. "Tell us first why you went out in the rain, with no coat?"

The old man sat down in a cushioned chair. He gave no heed to the water pouring from his clothes. He looked tired and listless.

"The levee is breaking," he answered simply.

Only his son seemed to understand. I looked up from the work of tying my shoes, procured in my room on the way to the library. We made a silent circle in the dim light.

"What does it mean?" Hayward cried. "Does it mean we'll be drowned?"

He spoke hoarsely; but the announcement steadied me. Floods were material, and could be faced. They couldn't run and hide behind the curtains.

"Nothing as bad as that," Southley answered. "Of course it means a flood; but by no conceivable circumstances can the waters reach the top of the hill where this house stands. But we'll be cut off from civilization—for days. The water will sweep all around the hill, flood the railroad bed, and fill all the low places—eight feet deep. We won't be able to reach the heights across the valley."

Hayward seemed to leap toward him. He simply appeared to break before our eyes. His voice rose shrilly, and he shook his arm in Southley's face.

"Then get me out to-night!" he screamed. "Get me away from this house while there's yet time."

"I'm afraid it is too late now," Southley answered.

"Call a car for me at once—hear me? There's still time to make the road. I won't stay here another hour. Get on your feet, you fool—and call a car for me. You'll regret it if you don't."

"There's no one to drive—but Ahmad," Southley answered wearily. "And what about your son?"

"Damn my son! Damn this wicked

house! Did you say Ahmad?" For an instant we saw the battle of two fears in his great face. "Get Ahmad, then. I'll be ready as soon as I find a coat. Vilas can tend to our business, and he'll communicate with me."

Southley sighed; then got to his feet. He touched a bell on the table. Only a moment we waited. Then through the door came Ahmad Das—calm, imperturbable, his Oriental face quiet as a seer's. Never was there such depth of shadow as we saw in his eyes.

He came swiftly across the floor with that marvelous, feline grace.

"Yes, *sahib*—"

"Get the touring car out at once," Southley ordered. "You have to take Sahib Hayward to the station. Don't lose an instant. The levee is breaking. It will be broken before you return, so you'll have to leave the car in the station and come in a boat. Arrange for supplies while you're there—we may be cut off for weeks."

"I'll cut down the walk to the base of the hill," Hayward instructed. "Pick me up there, and we'll save at least a minute."

The Oriental bowed, then slipped away. He went just like a shadow. He found a raincoat in the hall, and in an instant he was out in the flood of rain.

Hayward put on his own overcoat, and started out after him. The rain and the darkness swallowed them both.

A window had been left just beside the fireplace, and through it we could ordinarily see the garage. Ernest and I gazed through that window. Ahmad was evidently having difficulty in beating his way through the storm. It was a long time before we saw an indication that he had reached the garage. Then we saw his auto lights flash on.

We were barely able to make them out, although it was plain that the garage door was open and they were shining directly toward us. Of course the distance was far; and the piercing rays could hardly penetrate the wall of rain. The lightning had entirely ceased. We couldn't hear the roar of the engine at all. Then we saw, quite plainly, the track of the lights as the car sped about the shoulder of the hill.

Perhaps, in all, the walk to the garage and the starting of the car had taken four minutes. The walk to the base of the hill, where the postern path met the driveway, took ordinarily two minutes. It was straight downhill, and if Hayward had walked swiftly at all, he would certainly have two minutes to wait. The car came slowly, and still we could see the faint luster in the rain that was its lights.

They curved on to the base of the hill. Then Ernest uttered a syllable of exclamation. "He's driven past the point," he said.

"Possibly Hayward has walked on a few feet," I suggested.

The car slowed up and stopped for a single instant, then started slowly on. It was hard to believe that it halted long enough to permit the portly form of Hayward to enter. It looked to us as if Ahmad were trying to throw the car-lights onto the side of the road. Then, to our vast amazement, we saw him turn around.

The car headed back, just as slowly, and circled about to the garage.

"There's a misunderstanding somewhere," Southley muttered as he stepped up behind us. "Hayward certainly didn't say he'd meet him at the garage."

The servant stopped the car in the rain; and we waited a long three minutes for him to drive on again. We only knew he was standing still from the faint blur of the lights in the downpour. I don't remember that we three men talked at all. Possibly there were one or two wondering remarks—as to what was the cause of their delay.

"Maybe Hayward swung on when he made that little stop," Ernest suggested.

And just then the dark form of the Hindu came into the hall. The look of question on his face seemed very real indeed. I remembered it afterward, as did all the rest of us.

"Where," he asked, "is Hayward Sahib?"

"You mean Vilas?" Southley asked.

"The elder Hayward, whom I was to drive to the station."

"For God's sake, Ahmad! Did you miss him? He started out in the rain, and

was going to meet you at the foot of the path. Didn't you understand?"

"I looked—but he wasn't there. Then I thought I had misunderstood, and drove back to the garage. He wasn't there either."

"Good Lord, he'll be drenched. Go down the path and find him."

"Yes, *sahib*—"

My eyes were upon Ernest's face, and suddenly his gaze met mine. I think that we had the same thought.

"Wait a minute, Ahmad," he said quietly. "Keep the door shut." Then he turned to his father; and stood for a long instant as if in thought. "Father, I think that we'd all better go—and look for Hayward."

He spoke in a queer, preoccupied way; both Southley and I started at the words.

"What do you mean?" his father demanded.

"I think it would be best. There are certain possibilities that might make it very awkward for any one man to find him. They probably aren't true, but it's best not to take any chances. You don't have to go unless you want to, father. But I think that the doctor will want to go with me."

"You don't mean—that a doctor might be needed—"

"It's a treacherous night," his son replied. "Long, if you'll put on one of these overcoats—"

At the last instant Southley decided to come, too.

Even as we stepped down from the porch, we heard the rush of waters of the levee. It had given way completely at last, and if Hayward still wished to make the journey it was too late. Even the thunder of the rain became a whisper beside that sound. It was too much for human ears to receive and record, a crash and a bellow past all hearing. It roared out over the jungle, and the air seemed to jar and tremble from it.

For a long moment we stood in the rain and listened. Men's courage is not born to stand up under a noise like this. Of all the terrors that oppress the race, there is none more rending to the spirit than that

of the great disasters of nature. It is a primal, inborn terror, going back to the roots of the world. It affected us all the same. No man is so brave but that it would have affected him just as it did us.

But it was only for a moment. The bellow receded, until all we could hear was a roar as of a medium-sized cataract. Then when this was so dimmed that the noise of the rain obscured it, the four of us—we three Americans and Ahmad—walked on down the narrow path. Ernest walked in front, carrying the lantern. I was next, Southley behind me, and the Hindu, lost in the darkness, brought up the rear.

We saw no sign of Hayward at first. We got down to the driveway, and flashed our lanterns all along it. We looked up and down the path. We tried to call in the beat of the rain.

"Good Lord!" Southley cried. "He couldn't have got down into the river and drowned!"

We scattered about, and began to climb over the hillside. The rain, the bobbing lantern, the echo of the catastrophe, the dark house behind us and the gathering lakes in front, gave the scene a singular dreamlike quality. Then Ahmad, who walked close beside me, tripped and fell over something on the ground.

He uttered an oath in his own tongue; then whirled to look. He bent and felt about with his hand. The place he stood was a little neck of land that dipped down into the flood-waters, an isthmus that separated the height on which the house stood from the plateaus opposite.

"Bring the lantern," the Hindu called. "I have found Sahib Hayward."

The lantern showed everything very plainly. We understood why Hayward had not met the servant at the house. His neck was broken, as if by giant's blow.

when we lifted the shoulders from the ground. The four of us carried him into the house, not an easy load at all. Vilas Hayward met us at the door.

The effect on the younger Hayward was hardly what I expected. It was true that I didn't look for prostration. He was the kind of man that grows away from his parents in late boyhood.

"My father?" he shrieked. The sound went high and wild in the storm. "Don't dare to tell me he's dead."

"We don't dare to tell you anything else, because he is," Ernest answered.

Vilas leaped toward Southley; and for an instant I thought he would attack him. His face was drawn hideously in the half-light. He had evidently left his bed only when the levee gave way; he was only partially dressed.

"Then you're the devil that killed him! You, I say, Southley! You killed him to get rid of him, and you'll be trying to kill me next!"

"Don't be silly," I cautioned swiftly. "I was with Mr. Southley up to the moment that we found him."

"Then it was you, Long, in Southley's pay. I won't believe anything else."

Ernest tried to quiet him, and after he had got him away, I took the covering from the dead man's face. I made a close examination of the body. My aged host knelt beside me. Nothing but a superhuman blow could have so broken the neck. It could not have been from a fall; because only a severe fall could have done it, and out on the isthmus where we had found the corpse there were no heights to fall from. Besides, there was plenty of other evidence that some sort of a blow had killed him. The worst of them all were two, deep parallel grooves on his face, from which the flesh had been simply raked. The flesh was discolored, too.

"It's plain as the nose on your face that the man was murdered," Southley said. "Any coroner's jury in Florida would say so. And the sooner we get word into town the better."

"At least," I answered, "the murderer can't get away. Unless he got out before the levee broke, he's on the island with us."

CHAPTER XII.

THE ISLAND OF FEAR.

WE didn't stop to examine the body on that rain-swept hillside. I had known the neck was broken simply by the way the great head dropped back

"And it doesn't seem likely that he could get out without superhuman strength and agility. Of course it might have been possible for a speedy runner to reach the highlands across the valley before the flood waters swept over the isthmus, but it's certain he couldn't get back to civilization. The first thing to do is to post guards to watch over the lowlands, and see that he doesn't get out."

Southley's eyes met mine. I had never seen better self-control.

"The first thing to do is to quiet the negroes," I told him. "They are terrorized. The next is to send for aid."

The old man turned quickly. "Do you mean the coroner?"

"Yes. The State will send detectives. I will be glad. It is certain that one of us three will have to face a murder charge, and the sooner it is cleared up the better"

"But we three were together—"

"That won't matter. They will say we hired one of the negroes to commit the crime. We can improvise a raft, and send a man out to-morrow to bring the coroner."

"We can do better than that. I've got a little sneak-boat—just a canoe—that I use for ducks. We'll have to have a bigger one to bring supplies; but it will carry a message to the mainland."

There was little else to do in the rain. We went into the den, and just as morning broke we told Ernest and Vilas our plans. The rain was less violent now. The storm was at the ebb.

"I'm sorry I said what I did," Vilas apologized. "It was the excitement of the moment. But I would like to know what you think, Southley. What killed my father—accident, or murder, or what?"

The eyes of the two men met.

"Your father was struck down—there is no question about it," Southley replied. "He was killed by a blow from some unknown source. There is every reason to think that his slayer is still about this house and plantation, and every possible effort will be made to chase him down. No one will be able to leave—first, because of a rule that necessity prescribes; and second, because of the flood. Detectives will be sent out here to investigate."

"And what was the blow dealt with?" Vilas asked nervously. "Couldn't you—find the weapon?"

Southley looked at him sharply.

"That will be hunted for to-morrow," he replied. "All we could tell was that he was struck with some blunt sort of a weapon, and with terrific power—enough power to snap his neck like a reed. The blunt weapon must have had two nails or spikes—because there are two deep parallel scratches in the bruised flesh."

My eyes were upon Vilas's face. He didn't look at us.

"I only know one thing—one kind of a weapon that would leave a mark like that," he said in a strange, harsh tone. "And that isn't a weapon at all. It's an animal's paw."

"And that is the one thing that must be forgotten by all of us, if we are to learn the truth," Southley told him. "It only brings horror, not clear thought. Forget the legend at once, and begin with clear eyes. That's our only chance."

With this, our little group broke up. Ernest tried to snatch a few hours of sleep on the sofa. I had plans of my own that necessitated a consultation with the negro that was to carry word to the coroner when the sun rose. And just as I came back from my talk with him I met Josephine on the stairs.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

She seemed surprised at my tone.

"And what right have you to ask?" she answered me.

She might have been the spirit of the dawn itself in her soft, gray drape, and the light of stars in her eyes. I knew from her look that she had heard of the tragedy.

"It is just that I'm afraid for you," I told her humbly. "No one knows what might not happen—in this house."

"And you are still watchful for me—even since last night?"

Of course she referred to the scene in the den. No words can tell how appealing, from the shadows of the stairway, was her voice.

"Is it even an intruder's business to be watchful, at a time like this. I believe you'd better try to get some sleep."

"Still the doctor—but there are no personal wishes involved this time." She even had the spirit to smile at me.

But I couldn't answer that smile. The scene in the den had struck home too hard.

"Professional interest alone," I told her.

Maybe it was just the effect of the dawn that her eyes seemed to lose their luster before my gaze. She hurried on up the hall, turning at the door of her own room.

"Thank you for your watchfulness," she called to me. "And I'm sorry I spoke so rudely when you first spoke to me—and I don't expect any other—but professional interest—now. If there was anything that I could say—about last night—I'd say it, too. But I know it wouldn't help any."

"I can't imagine that it would."

"But at least—you are not going home to-day."

"The storm decided that matter for me, I'm afraid. But there may be a chance yet."

The door shut behind her. The early morning hours drew on, and the mist that was the twilight of dawn faded like the rain. It was a strange water-world that the morning revealed. The clouds faded as swiftly as they had come, and a bright sun revealed the house in the center of a vast, shimmering marsh. The railroad was inundated, the road was washed six feet deep, half the jungle trees stood knee deep in water. The highlands looked like islands in the middle of a great, gray sea.

One of the negroes had built a little fire in the library, and Southley joined me here. And in a moment Ahmad Das opened the door from the dining room.

He stood straight and calm and unruffled, not an expression that the eyes of man could read on his impassive face as he called us in to breakfast.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLEWS.

AFTER breakfast Ernest and I went down to the scene of the murder.

It would be several hours before the coroner came; and I thought that any obvious clues should be collected and pre-

served at once. Such things have mysterious ways of disappearing.

We had no difficulty in locating the exact spot where the body had been. Even the rain had not washed away all the evidence. My first work was to look about for footprints. There were none to be seen. The place was covered with a rich growth of grass, and root-filled turf as a rule does not receive a very clear imprint. Besides, the rains would have washed away any imprint that had been made.

We were no more successful in finding a weapon with which the crime could have been committed. We searched the hillside with the greatest possible care; and even waded a short distance into the swamp. Of course it seemed likely that any blunt instrument that could have inflicted the wound could have been easily tossed into the swamp water, from which it could not be recovered until the waters receded again.

Although it was inundated to a depth of six feet now, it was perfectly clear that the isthmus was still above the surface of the water at the moment of the murder. It was not covered until the final wreckage of the levee, several minutes afterward. It would have been possible for the murderer to have raced across the isthmus to the opposite high lands before the wall of water came. In that case he was still to be found in the thick jungle beyond.

Since the light had made it possible, we had put a negro in an upstairs window with a powerful pair of field glasses. If the murderer was indeed in refuge in the thick jungles, the glasses would reveal any attempt he should make to escape. His only hope would be to keep the plateau itself between him and the house, a feat that would become increasingly difficult as he neared the mainland. And it was true the water was too deep to wade. He would either have to construct a raft, or else risk his life in a long, desperate swim.

The watch was kept like the guard of an army camp. It was continuous. When the negro was obliged to leave his post another took his place.

We picked up a few surface clues. We found a man's hat; but it was perfectly evident that it was the hat Hayward had

worn. I had not particularly noticed it as he went out the door; yet Ernest recognized it as the same expensive felt that he had seen the elder Hayward wearing on many previous occasions. It contained no initials or any other sign of ownership, and it had a trademark of a hatter in the State capital.

But the place it lay was somewhat significant. It was ten full paces farther up the slope than the place where we had found the body.

"Could we have dropped it off when we carried the body to the house?" Ernest asked.

"When I lifted the head the hat was already off," I replied.

"Then you see what it means?" He looked at me darkly.

"It means that either part of the struggle occurred higher up the slope, or else some violent action at that point knocked the hat from his head. It seems to me there would be signs—deeper imprints—if the first was the case; and more likely that he saw or heard his enemy for the first time when he was on this point of the path."

"He must have been on his way down to the driveway then."

"Of course."

"He certainly could not have seen well in the darkness. He might have heard, though, or felt."

"Perhaps he could make out a shadow. Likely he started to run, and his hat fell off at the first leap."

"The levee was already breaking then. He must have heard its faint signs. It seemed likely he must have known that retreat by way of the roadway to the city was already cut off. Then why"—and the eyes bored mine—"did he run in the opposite direction from the house, rather than toward it. We found the body ten yards farther down the slope."

"Men in such terror as he must have been are not particularly careful which way they run. They only want to get away in any direction."

"But the most frightened man won't run in the face of the danger. It is perfectly evident then that his foe came behind him—between his own position and the house."

"That seems to be indisputable."

"The murderer must have chased him."

"Of course."

"And he must have been unbelievably fleet. It was true that Hayward was a large man physically, and would not ordinarily have been able to run very fast. But in such terror as he was, he would have ran faster than any expert track man. You know, Long, that no man ever really runs until he is in terror. Some reserve power and strength comes to his aid. You remember that from your own boyhood—the way you could get away from a watermelon patch when the owner got out his shotgun. He ran somewhat downhill, so every condition was with him for a fast flight. And yet his enemy caught up with him within ten yards!"

"It is an important fact, Ernest."

"It certainly is. Police records show that in very few cases have crimes been committed by a criminal actually overtaking a fleeing victim when they were both on foot. The victim's fear makes him the fleetest; and the criminal has only the strength of his purpose to make him fleet. Yet Hayward was overtaken in ten yards."

"Yes."

"He probably ran screaming—a sound that could not be heard above the roar of the storm."

I agreed to this, too.

"It's no ordinary crime, Long. The murderer had no ordinary motives. His passion, his blood madness, if I may use the word, must have been just as terrific an emotion as Hayward's fear—an emotion that inspired him to run fast enough down that slope to overtake his prey within ten yards."

"I don't believe I like the word prey in this capacity, Ernest," I told him. "There's an inference in it that isn't soothing to the spirit. But there isn't any doubt about the fury and intensity of the slayer. There's another element that proves it even more clearly than the fact that he overtook Hayward within ten yards."

"What is that?"

"The terrible, rending violence of the blow. A cold-blooded murderer wouldn't have struck like this. The slayer would

have waited in the darkness—struck from ambush with a billy or knife or pistol. Now look at this.”

I showed Ernest the imprint in the turf where the body had lain. It was singularly deep and distinct.

“Does it mean anything to you?” I asked.

“Do you mean that the blow was so violent that Hayward was simply knocked into the earth when he fell?”

“Nothing else. It is likely that he never moved or cried out after that blow struck him down. He was hurled to the ground with such force that he left this imprint—as if a meteor had smote him. The neck was broken—a clean, violent break. I knew it when I examined the body.”

We found one other clew that for a little while made us hopeful. It was one-half of a cuff-link, broken sharply off. It was a rich thing, of old gold and a single ruby. Then we walked back toward the house.

“I suppose you’ll know where suspicion will point,” Ernest said, just before we reached the steps.

We stopped, face to face.

“Good Heavens, man! Don’t you think I have eyes? No one can help but see the way things point—and there’s nothing in this world to do but cover our eyes and yell coincidence! But the detectives that come in the boat to-day—they’ll be fresh and have clear eyes. And they’ll suspect Ahmad Das. He was the one man that was out on the hillside with Hayward at the moment of the murder.”

“Of course. Although it is true he started in another direction.”

“You remember that he took a long time to get down to the garage. He might have waited for Hayward on the trail—then circled back to the garage and only pretended to look for him. I don’t say it’s true, but that’s what the coroner and the detectives will suggest.”

“But why didn’t he strike him as he went past, instead of chasing the screaming man down the hill?”

“Who knows! There might be such a thing as missing his first blow, and knowing that only by silencing the man’s lips could he be saved from an attempted mur-

der charge. At least, Ahmad Das will be suspected. And the crowning point is that he hated Hayward.”

“And Hayward hated him,” I agreed.

“Next after Ahmad, the negroes will be suspected, charged with being in the pay of either my father or me, or possibly you.”

“Yes, all of them will be investigated.”

“Vilas won’t be accused—very naturally—and of course my sister won’t. It would take more than a woman’s strength, or even the strength of any other than a large, powerful man, to administer such a blow as killed Hayward.”

We had now halted below the veranda.

“There’s one other thing to remember,” I told him.

“What is that?”

“Another thing to wonder at. As you say, only a powerful man, or something very powerful, could have dealt this blow. A man could not have done it, except with some great, heavy weapon that by its own weight would gather tremendous momentum. It was dark, and the two of them were in mad flight down the hill. Then think what wonderful accuracy, what perfect muscle control, was necessary for the pursuer to swing his weapon and strike the fleeing figure in front of him in the darkness—a blow as accurate as that with which a butcher fells a steer. It doesn’t seem hardly human.”

He started up the steps, and turned with a little laugh that was somehow very grim. “You might as well quit looking for things to be human—around this house,” he told me. “Abandon such hope—ye who enter here.”

Just then we heard the voice of the watchman, bellowing down the stairs. His glass had revealed the shadow of a boat upon the far reaches of the marsh.

CHAPTER XIV.

AND MORE CLEWS.

AT first the boat was just a black speck so far distant that we could not tell whether it was some one escaping from the plateau or a boat from the mainland.

"If it is the murderer, and he's getting away, there's no chance to stop him," Southley said. "We can't get word to the other side in time."

The speck was hard to follow. There were so many tree clumps and thickets that hid it. But slowly it became apparent that the boat was drawing nearer, and that it had a smaller craft, evidently a large row-boat, in tow. And within a half-hour more we could distinguish its occupants.

The large craft—a long, low motor boat—contained five men. Of course, one of them was a negro I had sent, one was evidently the skipper or owner of the craft, and two of the others were the coroner and his assistant. My hope lay in the fifth. If my telegram had gone true to its destination, to-night there would be new forces to cope with this problem of Southley Downs.

Most of the male occupants of the house were down at the edge of the water to greet the crafts. Their progress was slow. They constantly faced the danger of snags and submerged shrubbery that might wreck the motor boat. Ernest called to them, and showed how they might make a landing in the deep water beside the isthmus.

At first we couldn't see their faces. The glitter of the water prevented it. But when at last they drew close it was with the sense of the deepest disappointment to me. I looked in vain for the face I had hoped to see.

No one could mistake the coroner. He looked the part—somber clothes and all; he had the voice, too—those unmistakable tones of a confirmed mourner who knows all flesh is dust. His assistant was a rather sprightly young man, with the gloom of his profession yet to come upon him. The man who steered the boat was a character not unfamiliar to those who know the waterways. He seemed to be a quaint, good-natured old chap with sparkling eyes and bushy beard—a man evidently sixty years of age and still sprightly as a chickadee.

The mission had evidently not affected him at all. He called us a cheery greeting as the boats drew up. When he rose to make the motor boat fast, all of us saw that his garb fitted the rest of him. He

wore an old, mud-bespattered suit, and queer little rubber boots that were tied with strings and came just to his ankles, making a ludicrous bag of each of his trouser legs.

Sam, the colored man, was in the back of the boat, and next to him sat a lean, thin-faced man I had never seen before. But he had an official air, and I guessed him right as an inspector from a near-by city—a man on the plain-clothes force. He was an alert, determined man with a distinct air of authority.

My first words were with Sam. He swore that he had sent my telegram to the address I had indicated.

"I waited an hour for an answer, sir, and none came," Sam told me. "I could not wait no more. The detective gen'man said we had to go without him—and like as not he wouldn't be no good, nohow."

Sam's other errands he had done with dispatch.

"And where did you pick up the row-boat?" I asked. "You went over in Mr. Southley's duck canoe."

The question drew a long and detailed explanation. The motor craft, it seemed, had been procured by the coroner, and was to be used to convey the body. The duck canoe was not large enough to bring any supplies, so Mr. Southley had ordered Sam to procure a large, well-made rowboat to go back and forth in. At first he had despaired of finding any, until the old man who had steered on the way back to the house encountered him and offered his own boat and services for hire. He was a quaint old character that lived by the river at the edge of the city, and he had heard of Sam's inquiries. But he insisted that he be carried along to handle his own boat. The reason was rather obvious. The old man was evidently in need of the few extra dollars that his own services would bring.

"And what's the old fellow's name?"

"Robin—and he talked like a cockney."

Southley and I were with the inspector—his name turned out to be Freeman—when he examined the body. He made no comment. Since I had given up all hope of a greater detective coming to our aid, I turned over all the clues I had gathered to him. He was entirely scornful.

"Like as not you and young Southley spoiled a whole lot more clews than you found, by tramping around the body."

"We were careful about that, inspector," I assured him.

"I don't mean to infer your motives weren't the best," he went on with a world of tact, "but amateur aid doesn't help any, as a rule. The hat is evidently the property of the murdered man. This cuff-link—"

He examined the cuffs of the silken shirt that Hayward wore. "It's his cuff, too," he said shortly. "Broken off when he fell."

There was nothing more to be said on this point. The link in the left sleeve was the mate of the broken link we had found.

He heard our story, and we walked down with him to show him where the body had lain. He listened very attentively to our theory—that Hayward had attempted to flee from his enemy.

"It's a queer case," he told us then. "I don't know of any like it. As you say, he must have used something as heavy as a sledgehammer, and yet not hard like a sledgehammer. Anything very hard would have broken the skull into pieces, at the speed that it must have come. Those queer scratches are funny, too. But at least we've got the murderer pretty well sewed up. If he's in this house he can't get away—because already guards are watching the shores of the swamp. If he's on the highlands yonder, he can't get off them, either, except into the water where my men will see him."

Soon after this the body was carried down to the boat. The negroes seemed all to have disappeared when the moment came, but Ahmad, inscrutable as ever, and the bewhiskered old man that we called Robin, came to our aid. The inquest was to be held three days later, after the detectives had time to make their investigations.

"There's room for me, I hope?" I asked.

"Yes—"

"It will be necessary for me to leave this place and go back to my practice in Tampa."

Because I hadn't forgotten my promise of departure. Besides, there was no further reason for me to stay. Alexander Pierce

had failed to come. I had just been a guest, a spectator, from the first, and Josephine had seen to it that I had been no more. The renouncement in the den the evening before had told that all too plainly. I couldn't deny to myself how much I would have liked to stay, to see the affair to its end, perhaps to behold the curse lifted from the old manor house, and to watch the shadows depart from those sad eyes. Never before had the thought of being of service been so dear to me. But the stand the girl had taken in the den was impossible to disregard.

"I don't see why you can't go, Long, if you want," the inspector said. "You were just a guest here—though I will say that you came at a propitious time—and, besides, both of the Southleys vouch for you. Vilas says you're innocent, and they say that you were in the library when the crime was committed. Of course, you must tell us where we can get you on a moment's notice."

I told them, and asked them to wait until I got my bag. It was all packed and ready. And as I came down from my room I met Josephine in the hall.

She started back at the sight of me. I couldn't read the look that leaped to her face, except that it was a hurt look, almost a look of pleading. It was a surprise to me. Evidently she felt that she would miss whatever support I had been in these last nights of trial.

"You're going, after all," she said.

She didn't put it as a question. She spoke as if it were some unbelievable circumstance.

I tried to smile at her.

"Of course I'm going. I'm afraid I do not surpass as a detective. Besides—I've got to get back to my practice. Probably a hundred little fevered hands stretching to me—"

But her eyes arrested me and stopped the flow of my silly words.

"Perhaps you have forgotten—but we promised frankness. The first night at Southley Downs!"

"I had forgotten. Forgive me. And how long ago it was."

"And how much has happened since."

"How much—and this is the end."

I stretched out my hand, and she gave me hers. I had always wondered at that hand. It was so yielding, seemingly so tender. But I dropped it quickly, wondering at the tremor at her lips.

"Good-by, Miss Southley."

"May I walk with you down to the boat?"

"If you wish. But you remember—what is in the boat."

"I'm past all horror of that." She led the way out of the great door and down the path. What a slight, slim creature she was! "And I suppose there is nothing—that I can tell you—that would make you stay?"

"You've already been very kind and sweet," I said. "I'm glad that you cared at all. But I don't see any use of keeping up the sorry game any longer. It can't help but come to unhappiness in the end. I want you to have all happiness—"

I could scarcely hear her answer. The tone was so low—hardly more than a whisper. Perhaps it was just a little tremulous.

"I don't think you are very kind, doctor," the words came back. "You can't—me don't understand."

"Unkind because I wish you happiness? At least I can do that—with propriety. There has been enough between us that I can do that. The walks we had—they will be very beautiful to think about."

"I wish you'd not say any more."

But I went on remorselessly: "And don't think I'm going to be bitter. Women have always sacrificed for the men they loved—everything they had to sacrifice. No man can blame them if he is one of the sacrifices, as I was—in the den—last night."

She stopped as if I had struck her.

"You mean—that you think I renounced you last night, that I let you fall when I could have saved you—because I loved Vilas Hayward?"

"I would sooner attribute it to that than to some less worthy reason. At least it showed me that your love for him was everything—that nothing in the world could stand in its way."

"Then there is no use in pleading with

you any more, Dr. Long. Some time you may understand—and maybe be a little sorry. If you'd only stay, that time might be soon—before it is too late."

We could say no more. We had reached the boat. I shook hands with the Southleys; and, even as I said good-by, two strange impressions were knocking at the doors of my consciousness. They were not distinct. One of them was that old Robin was gazing at me with what was almost a look of abject bewilderment on his face; the other was that Josephine was whispering to Inspector Freeman—a hurried, urgent message.

When I looked at them they had moved to opposite sides of the group. His lean face was thoughtful. I gave my bag to the negro, and started to step on the boat.

"Wait just a minute, Dr. Long," the inspector commanded.

I turned to him. "What is it?"

"I've just been thinking—that I really haven't a right to let you go? I've learned that you had a scene with the elder Hayward—words and all that—on the night he was killed. It puts a different face on the situation; so I guess I'll have to command you to stay here until I know it is safe for me to let you go, doctor."

CHAPTER XV.

THE CROSS-EXAMINATION.

ALL the white occupants of Southley Downs—and that of course included the brown-skinned Ahmad, whose race is the root and source of the whole Aryan breed—met in the library immediately after the motor boat's departure. All of us took chairs, and Inspector Freeman stood in the center.

"This isn't a third degree, or anything like it," he explained. "I'm simply in search of explanations. I want to know who's who, and who knows what."

He called on Vilas Hayward first.

"Where were you on the night of the crime?" he asked.

"I went to bed at midnight."

"You were present in the den, in which you were insulted by Dr. Long?"

"Yes, sir. But I'm willing to forget that."

Yet his eyes did not look as if he were willing; they glowed darkly.

"But we're not willing to forget it," the detective replied. "The matter of motive for this murder is probably the most important feature in identifying the criminal. If we have a motive, we have something to work on. I believe that your father took your part in that discussion."

"That is true."

"And Southley did also."

Vilas hesitated—just an instant. "Yes, he supported me."

"I believe his daughter sided in with you, too."

"I would hardly say that."

"At least she offered no explanation why Dr. Long attacked you. Isn't that true?"

"It is."

"How did Dr. Long take this combined stand against him?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"It seems to me I am perfectly clear. Did he become angry?"

"I won't venture to say. It was plainly the greatest shock to him when Miss Southley took the attitude she did. I suppose my father gave him the greatest cause for anger."

"Why?"

"My father took the most determined stand against him, insisting on an apology or else a departure from the house."

"And what right did he have to insist that any of Southley's guests be told to go? What was his explanation for this breach of hospitality? The doctor was Southley's guest, not your father's. Why did your father feel he had a right to insist, in the terms he did, that Southley expel the doctor from his house?"

"I—don't believe I know."

"Think a minute."

Vilas's face darkened ever so slightly.

"I don't believe I care to have you question the manners of my dead father."

"It is a fair question."

"In spite of the difference in their ages, Southley and my father were old friends. They were very free with each other in all things."

"And did your father say anything of an insulting nature that the doctor might want to avenge?"

"He called him a 'pup,' I think, as well as other things."

"You say you went to bed at midnight. When did you learn of your father's murder?"

"After the levee broke—when the others came back to the house and told me."

"The sound of the breaking levee awakened you?"

"Yes."

Freeman called on me next. I told my story, as far as it concerned the finding of the body. I corroborated most of Vilas's testimony.

"How much time were you alone after the scene in the den and the time of the murder?" he asked.

"A few minutes after a midnight walk with Ernest—between a few minutes before one o'clock and immediately after."

"How did you spend your time?"

"I was undressing for bed."

"And then what did you do?"

I told him of our stalk through the halls. He seemed particularly interested, but also somewhat scornful.

"It isn't the purpose of the State to chase down ghosts," he said. "I think the less thought and said about that matter the better. You all were under a nervous strain, and I've heard the testimony of people in that condition before. It usually isn't worth the paper it's written on. I want to know if you had any time to yourself between the scene in the den and the murder."

Of course his reason for wanting to know was perfectly obvious. He wanted to see whether I could have possibly had time to hire one of the negroes to murder the elder Hayward. He knew that I had not done the deed with my own hands, from the fact that I had already established an alibi.

"We've got a motive for you, Long," he told me at the end, "but not much else. There are others that we have some of the other things, but no motive."

He called on Ahmad Das. The latter told him how he had gone out to the garage after the car; how he had looked in vain for

Hayward on the driveway; and how, later, he had found the body.

The detective flushed slightly and leaned forward.

"You didn't like the elder Hayward, Ahmad?" Freeman asked abruptly.

"No, *sahib*."

"Why didn't you? What had he ever done to you?"

"He was not pleasant to serve, *sahib*. Many times he swore—"

"And I believe he struck you once, Ahmad."

Ahmad's voice lowered. "Yes."

"And why did he?"

"I was slow in a service that he asked."

"He didn't like you either, Ahmad."

"It is true."

"Considering his influence with your master, did it ever occur to you that he might get you thrown out of employment?"

"Employ—"

"Get you kicked out of your job?"

"No, *sahib*; I never thought of that."

"Yet you knew of this influence. The fact that Southley let his guest strike you before his face."

"It seemed to me that they were the closest of friends."

"And where were you just before the bell rang, when Southley told you to get out the car?"

"In the kitchen."

"How long?"

"At least an hour before."

And he told him what he was doing to prove it.

Ernest corroborated my story perfectly.

"And what did you think of the elder Hayward?" he was asked.

"I didn't like him."

"And why not?"

"I didn't like his attitude with my father. He was too arrogant, and demanded more than a guest should. His manners were often boorish. Nor did I like the way he threw his son with my sister."

"I believe that was your sister's part to object—not yours."

"Perhaps it is."

"And she made no objection?"

"Never. Of course I don't know sis very well."

The detective and I looked at him in amazement.

"And what do you mean by that unusual speech?" the former asked. "That you don't know your sister very well."

"Because we went to different schools. Both of us are comparative strangers to Southley Downs."

The detective turned to Josephine.

"And what light have you to throw on this matter, Miss Southley?" he asked.

"None at all," the girl replied.

"And where were you, after the scene in the den?"

"I went straight to bed. My maid helped me undress."

"And the Haywards must not have been so unpopular with you as with your brother and Ahmad?"

"I was with both of them a great deal."

"And I think you took Vilas's part against Dr. Long."

Her voice lowered.

"Yes."

"And why did you do that?"

"Because I couldn't do anything else under the circumstances."

"You evidently didn't like Dr. Long?"

"I *did* like Dr. Long. But his relation with me was greatly different from that of Vilas."

She looked squarely into his eyes as she talked. The room faded except for her. The faces of the watching circle became as mist. I don't know why each answer that she made seemed to go so deep into me—each word—each inflection of voice an indelible imprint in my memory. I couldn't turn my eyes from her white face. I hardly heard the detective's questions when he turned to Southley. They came from somewhere far off.

"Please tell me, Southley, just what were the relations between you and the Haywards."

"The elder Hayward and I were the oldest of friends," the old man answered. He spoke falteringly, in the hesitant way of age.

"They had been here almost a month?"

"Yes."

"How long did you ask them for?"

His voice changed, ever so slightly.

"As long as they would remain."

"You were in the den, in the scene between Dr. Long and the younger Hayward?"

"Yes."

"You sided in with Vilas Hayward?"

"Yes."

"Did you think he was in the right?"

"I—I didn't know—for sure."

"Then why did you take the stand you did?"

His answer called me from my preoccupation. It rang in the quiet room. He spoke it softly, hesitantly; yet all other sounds became as nothing.

"Because, Inspector Freeman," he said simply, "I couldn't do any other thing with wisdom. Because Vilas Hayward is going to marry my daughter, Josephine."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MISSING EVIDENCE.

AFTER dinner I met Inspector Freeman in the hall. He called me to one side. Perhaps he was a little more intent, a little more nervous and quick of motion than in the afternoon.

"I'm in need of your help," he told me.

"And I'm ready to give it."

"Look in the kitchen and see where Ahmad Das is, and what he is doing."

I obeyed, on a plausible excuse. Ahmad Das was polishing the silver. I came back to report.

"The coast is clear, then," the inspector exulted. "Long, I want you to come with me and search Ahmad's rooms. I can trust you, I think, when I say that I haven't any further question but that the Hindu is the murderer."

"Then you must have uncovered something new."

"No; but he was the one man who went out of the house with Hayward—the one man in striking range. I don't believe the Southleys were implicated; and knowing you as I do by reputation, it is absurd to think that you were. That leaves Ahmad. We know that he hated him, so we have a motive. But the Hindu's a funny duck, isn't he? Did you ever see a man cross

the room with such a funny, catlike stride? He walks as if he had cushions on his feet."

We mounted to the third flight; then turned into Ahmad's room. My admiration for Freeman increased mightily when I saw him in action. It was impossible to imagine a more complete search.

"If there's murder, there's bound to be blood," he said. "Nothing is so convincing to a court as a garment with blood on it. He's been kept pretty busy since the murder, and I don't believe he'd have time to dispose of all his things. That's the chance I'm playing for."

But evidently Ahmad Das had foreseen this contingency. The detective searched swiftly for twenty minutes; then paused to wipe the little beads of perspiration from his lean face.

"It's no use," he said. "No clews worth finding."

He started toward the door. "There's one place you haven't searched at all," I told him.

"Where?" He turned in amazement.

"That drawer full of linen." I pointed to a drawer in the dresser.

"I glanced into it. He wouldn't put it in such an obvious place as that. Even Ahmad Das wouldn't be that much of a fool."

"Perhaps, Inspector Freeman, you have never heard of M. Dupin?"

Inspector Freeman stopped to consider. "His name's slipped my mind," he confessed.

"M. Dupin was a very famous detective—a Frenchman. A very great American wrote about him long ago."

"Oh, you mean a story-book detective!" Freeman scorned. "I'm glad to say I've never wasted my time reading such truck. None of 'em were ever practical. Practical men are the go nowadays. The time they wasted in theories and talk—"

"Yet sometimes their theories came out right. M. Dupin would have been the first to tell you that for the very reason that you would think that drawer too obvious a place for a man to hide a garment, it would be the very place an astute criminal would hide it. He would know in advance

that you wouldn't look there, and therefore it would be a good place. He proved it with the story of a stolen letter, hidden among a packet of other letters, in plain sight."

"It's all right in books; but it don't work out in life," Freeman commented.

Of course I knew that as a whole he spoke the truth. But it had begun to dawn on me that Freeman was not the highest type of official detective. If he had been, I would never have asked the question about Dupin; and I would have not had the cold courage to lecture to him now.

"Then there was a later detective—a little, fat Catholic priest," I went on. "He asked his friend where a wise man would hide a pebble."

"And his friend, if he had any sense, would have said to bury it six feet under the ground and smooth off the top."

"His friend told him to hide it on the beach. Then the detective asked where a wise man would hide a leaf. And the answer was—in the forest. I don't say that Ahmad Das would have chosen this drawer if he had time to choose a better place. But it is certainly the most likely place in this room."

I went to the drawer and hunted among the garments. And I'm afraid the color came to my face. Evidently my theories were to go unsupported by fact.

"I guess Ahmad Das didn't hide his pebble on the beach," the detective exulted.

Then I looked twice at a newly laundered shirt that I had picked up and laid down before. It struck me as being an unusually heavy garment. Some inspiration made me unpin it. And folded within it we found another shirt, covered with great splotches of dark brown stain.

Freeman leaped toward me, and took the garment in his hands. Just for an instant he examined it.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "You've found it after all. Do you know what those spots are?"

"No."

"They're blood. It's convincing proof. And it's Ahmad's shirt, too."

Swiftly he compared the laundry mark

on it with the mark of the other garments in the drawer. I didn't dream that this austere man was capable of such exultation. His eyes actually seemed to glisten; and a high color suffused his lean, dark face. I thought of a hound hot upon the trail.

"It's the final proof!" he cried. "We'll get him now. I'll wring a confession out of him."

Then both of us drew up sharply.

"Ahmad is coming into his room," I whispered. For I was sure that the faint sound I had heard had been the fall of Ahmad's light feet in the corridor.

Both of us instinctively braced ourselves. We didn't know what frenzy of desperation we would have to face if Ahmad saw us with that condemning evidence in our hands. A long moment dragged away.

Then Freeman stole to the door. He looked up and down the corridor.

"Must have been a rat," he exclaimed.

"Rather noisy for a rat."

"Maybe the wind. But we'd better get out of here. He'll come back any moment."

I started to pin the dinner shirt into even folds, just as I had found it.

"M. Dupin did the same with the envelope of the letter," I explained. "Then the criminal didn't know it had been found."

"I do believe you've got the makings of a detective!" Freeman told me with a little amazement.

Then we crept down the stairs. He took the shirt into the room that had been given to him for his use; and rejoined me in the library.

"I've got a queer hunch," he said.

His face was clouded. Little wrinkles were flickering between his eyes. I waited for him to explain.

"I've got an idea that some one's been following me this last three minutes. I'm not an imaginative man, Long, but I've had that hunch before. I never believed it; but once I woke up in the hospital with a bump as big as an egg over one eye where a billy had hit me—and knew that it had been so. It's a queer thing; yet I felt that way when I was going to my room just

now. The noise we heard in the corridor seemed to bear it out. But it isn't Ahmad. I stole out and took a look at him. His hands are buried in flour. There is no one in the servant's quarters but a colored man or two, and that long-legged whiskered bird that brought out the rowboat. Robin, I believe you call him."

There was no answer worth making. So we sat and watched the darkness steal over the marshes. It seemed to me that the waters had already begun to recede. The flood had been the sole result of the ten inches of rain; now it was done, and the river was quickly falling.

The Florida darkness is always worth watching. It comes so gently, so like a dark mist that the wind blows up. The color of the water changed and deepened. The shadows that were the jungle grew black. Again we heard the sounds of wild life that the storm of the previous night had stilled.

We smoked cigars and talked. And after while one of the colored men came to tell us of a discovery.

A flat rock jutted from the hillside about fifty yards from the scene of the murder, he said. Just at twilight he had walked near it, and had noticed a queer discoloration on the stone. It was evidently clotted blood, he thought, and what looked like fragments of flesh.

"You don't mean—human flesh?" Freeman asked.

His eyes narrowed, ever so slightly. It was evident that the colored man was terrified almost beyond power of speech.

"Yes, suh. I couldn't tell fo' sho'. But it was some kind of flesh, suh."

We didn't waste any more time. We hastened down the footpath. Although the night had fallen, the darkness was nothing of the intensity of the night before. I was able to discern the outline of his figure as he walked ten paces in front of me. I could detect the shadows that were the stables and garages, and the nearer of the cottages of the colored farmhands. And then, at the same instant, both of us saw another shadow.

Some one was standing perfectly still on the hillside. Of course we couldn't see

plain. He was possibly fifty feet distant; and if we had not possessed such an accurate knowledge of the geography of the hill he might have easily been mistaken for a shrub or stump. He was doing that which all hunters learn to do, standing perfectly still to avoid detection. He was trusting to the shadows to obscure him.

We both stopped on the trail.

"Who's there?" the detective demanded.

The shadow did not waver.

"Who's there? Answer, or I'll shoot,"

Freeman insisted. He started across the turf toward him. And as a deer springs, the other sped down the hill in flight.

There was something startling in the speed with which he ran. We flung out in pursuit, Freeman firing his pistol in the air. But even if he had wished, it would have been impossible, except by the blindest luck, for the detective to have hit the fugitive. A pistol is never accurate at long range; and few marksmen can shoot at all in the darkness. In an instant our quarry faded, slipped away and melted in the shadows.

We ran and cried out and hunted over the hill in vain. And after a while we met again, on the path.

"If that doesn't beat the devil!" the detective greeted me. He was panting, and he swore softly between his gasps. "Long, there's plenty of things yet, about this case, that I don't know."

"Do you think that was Ahmad?"

"Couldn't have been. The Hindu was in the house when we left. But there isn't any doubt but that he committed the crime. I'm sure of that much, anyway. And now there's nothing to do but go down and find that stone that the colored man told us about."

We found the place where the body had been found, and struck off fifty yards directly to the left. The detective flashed his light about. He called out when he saw the stone. It was the only white rock in the vicinity, and it could not be mistaken. He knelt quickly beside it.

Then he got up with a little snort of disgust. "That colored man was crazy. Nothing here—but by the Lord!" He scarcely breathed as he rubbed his hand

over the surface of the rock. He bent until his eyes were within a few inches of its rough face.

"What now?" I asked.

"Somebody's beat us to it, that's all. This rock has just been washed off, with water. Either there's another amateur de-

tective around this place—cleaned off the clots to make blood-tests—or else the walls of that old house have ears!"

"What do you think?"

"What is there else to think but that some one came down here and destroyed the evidence?"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



The Gilded Caravan

by Robert Terry Shannon

Author of "The Girl With the Jazz Heart," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

THE lights of the Great Gargan Shows flashed and glittered. Contending with the blaring music from a dozen mysterious and alluring tents, raucous voices of brass-throated spielers and barkers rose in a bedlam of high-pressured harangue addressed to the milling crowds. From the animal tent came terrifying roars and snarls of caged beasts. The air was heavy with the confusion of mildly exciting odors.

The modest city of Oakenburg, that had, for the single month he had been there, seemed so terribly lifeless to Marvin Thayer, was transformed overnight into a bewildering Bagdad—a topsy-turvy metropolis of mountebanks and gulls, all laboring under a rather pleasant form of hysteria. Undeniably, the traveling carnival had brought to Oakenburg, on the edge of the Kansas wheat belt, a glamorous incandescence. Despite himself, the hila-

rious spirit won its way into Thayer's head; he was conscious of an itching uneasiness in his blood.

Young Thayer—he was two years out of Harvard—had served his apprenticeship as a reporter on a newspaper in New York, where he was born and reared. With the small fortune left him by his Uncle Peter he had followed Greeley's advice and gone West to grow up with the country. He now owned the controlling interest in the *Oakenburg Daily Monitor*. His jaw had a bulldog clamp, and he intended to stick.

Some one plucked at his sleeve. For a moment his eyes blinked with astonishment. At his elbow, clad in the flowing silks of the Orient, was an aged Chinese—so old that his face, with its tenuous white mustache, was shriveled and dark like the hull of an English walnut. The ancient one bowed low.

"Honored sir," he said in a mellowed

voice, "may we not draw away from the crowd to a spot of seclusion? The message I bring should be imparted in secret as befitting its infinite importance—to you."

Marvin smiled.

"My friend," he replied, "I'm afraid you are all wrong. You can't interest me in fan-tan or any other game of chance. No discourtesy intended, old chap—but I don't give a hang which shell the little pea is under, or anything of the sort. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly." The narrow eyes of the Chinese were dull slits of ebony, steady and unabashed. "You are not ignorant of the snares of the carnival."

As a matter of fact, Marvin Thayer, being a New Yorker, had never before seen a carnival. His knowledge of those wandering semicircuses which are so familiar to millions in the West and South had just begun. Nevertheless, he fancied he had sufficient sophistication to dodge any confidence game.

"You will not refuse to listen to what I shall say," the Oriental went on, unruffled. "It is not I, Yen Chang, alone who speaks. It is the voice of Destiny. Shall we withdraw to one side and out of the throng?"

Thayer was conscious that the shifting crowd about him was gathering into a little compact knot of honest-faced pleasure-seekers trying to hear what the Chinese was saying. Suddenly he began to feel conspicuous.

Unperturbed, Yen Chang waited.

"All right—let's get out of this," said Thayer on an impulse.

Together they made their way from the congestion to the comparative privacy of a space behind one of the red-and-gilt circus wagons that stood some small distance off the dazzling Midway.

"Now—what is it?" There was, despite the abruptness of the query, a certain deference in the younger man's voice—an instinctive respect for the venerable age of the other.

"My son"—Yen Chang uttered the words smoothly and confidently—"happy is the man to whom wisdom and love comes early in life. There are those favored by

such gods as may be to whom the greatest blessings come unbidden. There is no greater strengthener of character than responsibility—no sweeter joy than love. Both are yours. Out of the multitudes you have been chosen. Your duty and your reward have arrived simultaneously. Know thou to-night your full measure of life begins."

Thayer listened with a half-concealed quirk of amusement on his lips. Still, despite himself, he was aware of a note of sincerity in the voice of the Chinese.

"I grant all you say, my friend. You are eminently correct about love and responsibility—but why single me out?"

Yen Chang raised a thin wisp of a hand. "In the days of his youth a man craves love, in his middle years he requires it, in age he withers without it. Such is the wisdom of the Master. Man strives, but the issue of life is settled by Fate. To-night at eleven come thou to the tent of Princess Kira. She will await you. She is thy chosen bride."

A Puritanical streak in the nature of Marvin Thayer felt the tremor of a shock. He whistled softly through his teeth. "I am much obliged, my friend—but I'm sorry I can't accommodate the princess. If you will excuse me—"

Again Yen Chang lifted his prophetic hand.

"Know thou, my son, it is folly to leap into suspicion's arms. She who waits is a flower whose fragrance wilt charm thy whole life. I go now to take her the news." Yen Chang turned with sedate dignity.

Marvin Thayer resisted the impulse to stay him. Hard-headed, practical, he had never imagined that any episode so flamboyantly romantic could occur in real life—least of all in Oakenburg.

The whole thing, he told himself, was a hoax, the preliminary to a swindling game of a new variety. Yen Chang's air of solemnity was a mere bit of skillful acting. Thayer decided that the quick eye of the Chinese must have noted that he was a bit better tailored than the average young man of the town—might, perchance, have a supply of cash in his pockets worth going after. Yes, that was all.

For a moment he had been impressed by the Oriental's theatrical demeanor. Abruptly he determined to see it through; to unmask the Princess Kira and her agent; to work the whole affair up into a rattling sensational story for the morrow's columns of the *Monitor*. Already he visualized a corking newspaper yarn.

Mingling once more in the crowd, he drifted along down the bright avenue of tents with their flaming posters. In succession he passed the snake show, the Hawaiian dancers, the plantation minstrels, the trained animal exhibit. Japanese rolling ball games, knife and cane racks, spindle wheels with boxes of cheap candy as prizes—all calculated to entice dimes and quarters from open pockets—flourished noisily in booths amid pretentious tents.

Farmers and their families—honest, hard-working citizens of Oakenburg—bedazzled and enchanted—swirled in and out of one show after another, spending little at a time but a great deal in the aggregate.

Thayer observed keenly the difference between the populace and the barkers and hangers-on of the carnival. The latter, for the most part, were hard-faced gentry, flashy of attire, almost a race apart. More than once he caught the intonation of crook voices—the corner-of-the-mouth vernacular. Beyond doubt, Thayer was convinced, the Great Gargan Shows was but a mask for the operations of more than one slick-fingered trickster.

The thought gave him quiet satisfaction. Yen Chang, in a way, had been the bearer of a challenge.

Near the end of the illumined way he came to the tent of the Princess Kira. A great painted canvas depicted a veiled lady peering intently into the depths of a crystal ball. Upon a painted stall that elevated him several feet above the heads of the crowd a hatchet-faced youth in a vividly checked suit rasped out a plea to the crowd gathered before the entrance:

"Goin' on all the time! Learn your future from Princess Kira—the little lady wot reads the palm like an open book! The seventh daughter of a seventh son! The marvel of the occult world! Step in, gents, and get the low down on it whether your

sweetheart's true or false! Ladies—can your husbands be trusted? The Princess Kira'll tell you. Get the straight dope!"

Incredibly cheap as it seemed, Marvin Thayer observed that the spieler was gaining an attentive audience. The man's eyes glowed; a color crept into his drawn, pale cheeks. One emaciated arm was thrown into the air—fingers snapped nervously.

"Everybody gets a special reading from Kira! Immediately following a series of feats in leger'main an' sleight-of-hand by Yen Chang—the Oriental Wizard, the Gran' Old Man of China! On the inside! Only a quartah of a dollah—the price of a good cigar or a bad drink of moonshine!"

Marvin Thayer passed up a silver coin and received a green ticket from a roll. At the flap entrance of the tent Yen Chang was acting as doorman.

"Please do not enter," said the Chinese courteously. "Wait until the appointed hour. This performance is of no interest. Later on—" Yen Chang smiled with a touch of mystery. "Would you see us at—our worst?"

A sense of momentary defeat struck Marvin. Yen Chang was insisting upon playing the game under his own rules. In a flash the young man decided to accept the conditions.

"All right, my friend," he said with well-simulated nonchalance. "Anything you say goes."

Leaving the vicinity of Kira's tent, he sought the specious amusement of one attraction after another, until, after ten thirty, the crowd thinned to a few stragglers. The multifarious noises had died down; one by one the lights had vanished. By eleven o'clock the grounds were almost in darkness, except for a shaded light here and there showing dimly behind some canvas wall. Most of the carnival people had vanished—gone, no doubt, to the rickety railroad coaches on a siding a half-mile away, where they ate and slept.

Within the tent of the Princess Kira there was a faint glow of light. Thayer looked at his watch. It was exactly eleven. Squaring his shoulders with an involuntary movement, he drew aside the tent flap and entered.

Instantly Marvin Thayer knew that the tense, vibrant girl who rose quickly from the deep wicker chair was not of the carnival fraternity. Small, dark—she was scarcely more than twenty—he got from her an impression of regality, of delicate, sensitive features hardly akin to her surroundings.

Baring his head, Thayer stood, speechless for a moment, facing her. The interior of the tent was small. Half of it—evidently the audience's section—was roped off. The girl stood beyond the rope on a plank floor, overlaid with a heavy Chinese rug in yellow and blue. An ornate table of dark wood was in the center of the impromptu stage with a few wicker chairs beside it. In the background were two rattan chests, gayly painted with dragons, which Thayer imagined contained wardrobe and magical paraphernalia.

All this he sensed, rather than saw, with the trained eye of a newspaper man accustomed to absorbing details. Yen Chang was nowhere in sight. The girl's hat was on the table, which afforded him the opportunity of seeing a luxurious mass of smoothly coiled lustrous hair. She was pleasing to Marvin Thayer's eye in every way—her gracefully modeled hand, her splendidly smart suit of dark material.

All of a sudden the young man felt extremely foolish. Her sustained aloofness under his scrutiny put the burden of the first speech upon him.

"It's eleven o'clock," he said, with a sensation of appearing in an awkward rôle.

The girl advanced a step, rested a hand on the table.

"Yen Chang told me you were coming," she said simply. "He spoke to you entirely without authority from me. I have waited here only to ask the kindness of you not to repeat anything he may have said. His idea is utter madness; it places me in a most humiliating position."

She picked up her hat and began placing it on her head. "That's all that is to be said. I'm sure you won't insist upon discussing it. And if you will please go—"

Thayer, however, had no intention of so lightly forsaking the adventure that had been thrust upon him. For the moment

he was nonplused, but he could not consider the idea of being balked by its solution.

"I have no desire to add to any humiliation you may feel," he assured her, with a rapid conviction that this girl was not a sharper, no partner in a confidence game. "Rather, I'd like to—well, I can't help being just a bit curious. Surely, you understand—"

The girl picked up her white gloves.

"I understand perfectly," she replied evenly.

Thayer was aware that she had observed him—tried to estimate him—as fully as he had her.

"I assume you are what is called a gentleman," she went on, "and that you won't insist upon questioning me. I am now going to my compartment in the railroad train. May I ask that you will not offer to escort me? I am quite competent to take care of myself."

There was in her voice not a trace of friendliness, yet, despite her show of calm, Marvin Thayer fancied he caught a suppressed note of anxiety. Manifestly he could do nothing but accept her spoken wish.

Bowing slightly, he determined that, somehow, he would see her again—that, somehow, they must have a satisfactory conversation.

"I shall do as you ask," he said politely. "Forgive me, please, for intruding."

"And you won't try to—to follow up?"

Thayer smiled. "Would it distress you terribly if I did?"

Some internal struggle of the girl manifested itself to his discerning eye in the shadow of a worried frown that passed across her face.

"It would be a kindness if you did not concern yourself with me in any way or ask any questions whatever," she said almost wistfully.

A quick, intuitive sympathy surged through Thayer. Behind her careful aloofness he imagined she was a prey to some seething unrest. For the present he felt the kindest thing was to leave her.

"I will say good night." He moved toward the door.

"Good night."

As he turned the opening in the tent was filled. A man, squat, bulky, came in—a florid person with a round face, with the faint odor of perfume about his Palm Beach garments.

“So!” The newcomer eyed Marvin unpleasantly. The newspaper man sensed the odor of liquor from his breath. “Vell! Vell!” The accent was unmistakably Teutonic. “So! I vill have a last, final vord vit you alone—” The last was directly to the girl.

A sudden heat of anger swept through Thayer’s veins. The old badger game! The irate “husband”—to be appeased only by blackmail. Heavens! It seemed scarcely possible such an ancient swindle was still operative.

A great desire forced itself upon him—to plant a hard, compact fist in the center of the other man’s fat face.

A half articulate gasp from the girl caught his ear as his fist clenched. He saw that she was genuinely pale.

“Don’t go, please!” she said swiftly. “If you will wait outside—just for a minute—”

At once Thayer knew that she had no willing part in any trick.

“Certainly—it will be a pleasure,” he told her, with a cold glance toward the intruder who stood watching him with a scornful sneer.

The girl deliberately faced the man. “If you have anything to say—say it. This is the last chance you’ll ever have.”

The man pushed his Panama hat to the back of his bristly head.

“Ach! I don’t know about dot!” he said confidently in a voice somewhat unsteady from drink.

Marvin Thayer passed out of the tent—waited a few steps away. Of the dozen conjectures that tumbled through his brain he was unable to seize upon any one as probably explanatory. In any event, he burned with the hope that the girl might call him.

Never before had he felt such a spontaneous, bitter antipathy toward a fellow creature as toward the bumptious stranger. Intensely alert, he waited, with a craving in his heart for physical violence.

From within the tent he distinguished the merest blur of voices. Evidently the pair had crossed to the farthest side—or they were talking under breath. Suddenly Marvin imagined he heard a moan—a muffled cry from the girl.

Swiftly he moved toward the entrance, tore back the canvas.

Ghostly pallid, she who was called the Princess Kira rushed past him with a low moan of horror—of terror. Thayer watched her flight for an uncomprehending moment of inaction, and then pushed his way into the tent.

Sprawling, face downward on the low stage, lay the heavy form of the man in Palm Beach, with an ever widening splotch of crimson staining the back of his light coat under the bunchy shoulders.

Thayer vaulted the rope, turned over the inert form.

Already the man was dead.

II.

OF the row of electric bulbs strung across the stage only one was burning, just as it had been when Thayer left the tent. By its rather inadequate light he gazed with a growing sickening horror at the pasty face. The knife—it could not have been a bullet—must have reached the heart. She must have—

Momentarily, his efforts at deduction came to a chilling halt. Something ached poignantly in his breast. The girl had seemed so—well, somehow like the nice girls he had known. All at once he was overcome by a tide of pity and sympathy for her in the terrible extremity that had driven her to such a deed.

Of course she was blameless, in any legal sense. Beyond doubt her provocation had been sufficient. Marvin Thayer found himself contriving all manner of justifications.

His eyes fell again to the motionless body, and his blood grew cold. It was murder—grisly, undeniable. In any analysis it had been unnecessary. He, himself, had been standing within ear range of any cry for assistance.

Rigorously, his conscience asserted itself. All that was respectable and law-abiding in

his nature came to the surface. In his soul he condemned the crime, yet—simultaneously—he was distressed by a lingering sentiment that warmed his heart toward the girl. Resolutely he put aside the encroaching idea that he had, strangely, fallen under her fascination.

The instinct of the reporter began to stir him and he became logical and observant. Methodically he began, mentally, to take notes. Doubtlessly the crime had picturesque ramifications that would make it sensational. The news of it, he could see, was far beyond local significance. The setting—everything—would combine into one of those rattling good stories that are sucked up by the thirsty telegraph wires and sprayed broadcast throughout the nation.

In none of this was Thayer cold-blooded. Merely, it was his professional job to handle the thing adequately and swiftly. With a rapid gaze he swept the dim interior—his heart bounded joyfully as a new possibility occurred to him. Something like a prayer was on his lips as he hoped that his surmise might be correct.

It was possible—even probable—that the Princess Kira had not struck the death blow. There might have been a third person in the tent. God! If there was a ghost of a chance he'd go the limit of his skill and influence and money to prove her innocent!

There was only one entrance and he was sure the third person—the murderer—had not used it. It would have been an easy trick to raise up the canvas side wall; easy to enter and leave the same way.

Thayer bent down and tried to lift up the thick fabric to demonstrate the theory. Once more he felt a sinking sensation. The canvas was firm—taut—against a narrow baseboard. Striking a match he saw that it was hooked on the inside to the running scantling at six-inch intervals. Following the wood around on his hands and knees he was unable to find a place that was unhooked—that would have permitted either ingress or egress.

The tent, at the bottom, was tightly closed around its entire circumference. The stage, which sat on four by four timbers, was not high enough from the ground

to conceal any one. Reluctantly and disappointedly, Thayer was coming back to his first conclusion as to the girl's guilt when his eyes fell upon the rattan chests. Once more he became a prey to thrilling hope.

Like clockwork his mind began putting together a new conjecture. The murderer had known that escape—immediately—would be attended by too many risks.

The idea of sealing the bottom of the tent, Thayer imagined, was to prevent the free and surreptitious entrance of small boys to the performance. This the murderer must have known—must have realized the impossibility of replacing the hooks once he was outside.

When the girl had fled the man, left alone with the body, might have feared she would make an outcry and attract attention that would end in pursuit and capture. Thayer looked carefully at the two chests. Each was plenty large enough to conceal a man. It was possible that the murderer, expecting the visit of his victim, might have lain in wait in one of them. It would be beautifully simple to hide in one of the chests until a favorable opportunity came to escape.

To lift the lid and disclose the hiding murderer would, most likely, be the instant signal for a life and death battle. The man, beyond doubt, still retained his death-dealing knife.

Nevertheless, Marvin Thayer, cold and grim, set his teeth and threw back the hinged lid of the nearest chest. It was empty—just a showy piece of stage property.

Striding quickly across the thick rug without a glance at the silent figure, he jerked up the top of the remaining chest. Except for a few neatly folded silk garments—evidently the costume of the Princess Kira which she had put aside—it was as vacant as the first.

The conclusion was painfully inescapable. The girl had been the only one in the tent with the slain man. Thayer had not been a dozen steps from the only exit—no one could possibly have come out unnoticed.

In a last desperate effort to account for the disappearance of the hypothetical third

party, he sought to find a gap at the juncture of the side wall and the sloping roof. The attempt was a failure. The canvas ran in uncut strips from the ridge to the ground.

In the few brief moments Thayer had done all that he could in behalf of the girl. He was at the end of his rope, and he knew it. It was an absolute certainty that only the Princess Kira and the man now dead had been in the tent.

But one chance in a hundred remained to establish her innocence. It might have been a case of suicide. There was, however, no visible wound on the front of the body and—mastering his feelings—Thayer once more turned it over. A slit, thin and scarcely more than a half inch wide, showed plainly upon the stained coat where the knife had been driven under the left shoulder, just beneath the shoulder blade.

A hasty search failed to locate the weapon. The hypothesis of suicide was smashed. Marvin Thayer had no inclination to examine the man's pockets for cards or papers of identification. That was a job for the police.

Reaching up, he turned out the lone electric light and left the tent. At a distance he caught sight of a man, he thought, disappearing behind another tent.

"Nasty business," he told himself, half aloud. "And I'm mixed up in it clear to the hilt!"

The police would, of course, arrest the girl immediately, Thayer reflected, as he climbed into his roadster, recently purchased, which was parked near the carnival grounds. And, he realized clearly, it would be his testimony that would convict her—for he had a growing conviction that an acquittal was extremely unlikely. Oakenburg juries, hard-headed, were reluctantly given to sentiment.

Even so, he felt it his duty to tell the full truth; to conceal nothing. In the back of his brain a hard insoluble mystery lurked disturbingly: had Yen Chang lured him to the tent for any purpose connected with the murder? Had the Princess Kira conspired to drag him into it?

Murder, in itself, was no novelty to the young man. As a reporter in New York he had encountered it a dozen times in its

most bizarre forms. But never before had it been a matter of personal interest. Yes—"heart interest"! From out of the nowhere a dart had shot and touched him with a sentiment that he was afraid to admit. Manfully he tried to persuade himself that the Princess Kira meant nothing to him. Yet he knew, down deep, that no woman had ever impressed him so vividly and so bewitchingly.

He had headed his car toward the police station, intending to make a full, frank report of what had occurred. But man, however, has less to do with his conduct than his ego imagines. Forever he is at the mercy of chance.

A rear tire on the roadster blew out with a bang. By such trivialities is life swayed. Marvin Thayer spent a wretched fifteen minutes stubborn metal and rubber making the replacement. The night had grown hot and thick. Just as he had accomplished his task the elements intervened.

With a swish and a roar the rain came without warning, drenching him to the skin. His was a one-man top. Twenty men could not have raised it in the hour of need—so perversely caught and clamped were the malignant catches and hinges.

Soaked to the skin, Thayer reverted to the primitive and followed the age-old instinct of his kind. He made a dash to get in out from the rain.

Springing into the seat he shot through the slithering streets toward home where there were dry clothes and a raincoat. All of which meant that the night captain of police would have to wait an hour, at least.

The apartment he occupied was rather a spacious affair in a new brick building just off the main thoroughfare. By day it was in charge of an elderly housekeeper who cooked his meals and kept the place livable. At night, after she had gone home, Thayer amused himself usually with his books and editorial labors. As nearly as possible for a bachelor he had established a home.

Parking the car in front he bounded up the stairs and inserted the key into the lock of his door, which opened into a wide living room.

Speechless, he stood in the doorway.

In the depths of a tapestry chair Yen

Chang sat at his ease—unbelievably Oriental in his robes; incongruous amid furnishing as American as the prairie breezes.

And near him, a pale, huddled little figure, shrinking into the capacious maw of a great armchair of mulberry, the Princess Kira wriggled one foot nervously. For a time she avoided Marvin Thayer's gaze, but finally she met it with eyes that failed to waver, despite the mist that was gathering in them.

Thayer started to speak—swallowed hard, said nothing. The delicate chin of the girl quivered. Her lips trembled and—wholly feminine—she buried her face in her hands with the faintest of moans.

Yen Chang rose; a withered lemon of a man with eyes that now shone like glistening coal. In the full light of the room he was definitely ancient.

"You will understand, my son, in the future why we came here." The Celestial spread out a thin, dried hand. "It is the hour of need and I—I am but a feeble old man—a tree with dead branches."

III.

MARVIN THAYER had never felt so helpless—nor looked it. He found himself centering his whole attention upon the charm of the Princess Kira's hands. And a few minutes before he had actually suspected her!

Yen Chang was explaining something:

"I knew your name before I spoke to you—a taxicab driver who knew your address—janitor—pass key—"

Suddenly conscious that, having finished, the Chinese was standing and waiting a reply, Thayer smiled vacuously. With only the slightest idea of what had been said he nodded in full agreement.

"Exactly—and sit down, won't you? Just anywhere—make yourself perfectly at home."

The Princess Kira lifted her face; flushed now—struggling to keep brave. "You—you don't think I killed him, do you?" she asked, with a quiver in her voice.

"Of course I don't!"

"And I didn't want to come to your house, but—"

"Mighty glad you did. Only—" His voice grew serious. "That was an awful job—back there—and I wish you'd tell me all you can about it." A growing sense of responsibility was upon him. "Tell me—do you know who it was who killed him?"

Her expression appealed to him with infinite pathos.

"I don't know. I couldn't bear to listen to what was being said to me. I turned to leave—he was behind me. There was a moan. As he fell I *knew* he was dead! That's all I know."

"And the other person—"

"There was no one else. We were alone, but—I can't understand it. Just the two of us there and he pitched forward dead with little gushes of blood coming out through his coat."

Yen Chang took up the story. His eyes, when Thayer first encountered him, had been dull, nearly lifeless. Now they were preternaturally bright. When he spoke there was a new American crispness in his voice and words.

"I was waiting at a distance for her. She came my way as she rushed from the tent. She was distraught, but she managed to tell me what had happened. It was a crisis. We are here!"

"So I see," said Thayer, grimly.

The girl sprang to her feet.

"Come—we'll go—to the police—anywhere!" Her voice was restless, humiliated. "I suppose you think still that I am responsible for the ridiculous things Yen Chang said to you to-night. He is an old man and given to utter absurdities. Actually I think his mind is going."

Her eyes blazed upon the aged one, but Yen Chang, in the wisdom of his years, said nothing and gazed intently toward the ceiling. She returned to Thayer; went on rapidly:

"I was so wrought up I didn't know where he was taking me. Can you understand that? As though it were not enough to shame me with his ridiculous statements to you, he has put me in an unspeakably false position by bringing me here. It is unworthy of his—his past!"

Thayer indicated the chair in which she had been sitting.

"I think I can understand that part of it right enough," he said softly. "But this is not the time to worry about that. Another matter of life and death, perhaps, faces us. Won't you sit down and talk it over calmly? I am going to help."

She was irresolute, nervous. Yen Chang sat silently; content, it appeared, to leave the situation to the other two.

"I want to go, but I don't know—"

"Won't you sit down, please?" she complied.

"There is only one point in the whole thing that really matters. You said you didn't—you didn't know, either, who it was that—"

"Mr. Thayer, I am as innocent as you are and—as ignorant of the murderer."

For one tense second their eyes met. Marvin Thayer realized there was an acceleration of his pulse; a deep expansiveness in his chest. It was a feeling he had experienced before in college football in that keen instant before the kickoff.

"I believe you!" he declared vibrantly. "I believe you and I'm going clear through for you. Just as though you were my sister. Agreed?"

The girl faltered. "It's wonderfully kind, but—" She looked toward Yen Chang. "I suppose I ought to be frightened to death, but—oh! I'm so ashamed—of what he said!"

Thayer smiled. "Don't worry about that. We'll agree to forget it. Now, if you'll just wait five minutes—"

He returned in dry clothing, buoyed with stirring interest, determined to probe the murder mystery, and then the immensely more important one of the charmingest, most intriguing girl, he had ever known.

"Let's get at this thing lawyer fashion. Even minutes may be vitally important. You won't mind a bit of a cross-examination?"

"Not at all."

"Fine! First, now—your real name?"

"Velma Ross."

"Don't think me too personal. Who are your people? Where do they live?"

"I have only a younger sister. She is in a private school."

"You are a professional palmist?"

"No—this is my first attempt."

Thayer's eyes shifted toward the Chinese. "Tell me, frankly, all you know about Yen Chang, please. I want to have everything clear in my mind."

It was Yen Chang himself who answered, fluently.

"I am a magician and a charlatan. Without apology I admit it. So was my father and his father before him, and so back to the first Yen Chang. We are what we are. It is a thing of the blood and quite respectable, I assure you, in the sight of the Great One.

"It is a profession that is ninety-nine parts sham and one part supernormal. No? You do not believe the last. Ah—you are of the West. It makes no difference. Perhaps, as a child, you saw the Great John Ross—the wisest magician of your Western World?"

"I have heard of him," Thayer admitted.

"Her father. John Ross, when he was young, studied in China. She was born there—in the province of Chekkiang. I was an old man then; far past the natural span. I am her godfather, and now, as I approach earthly dissolution, it devolves upon me to place her in the hands of—but I digress!"

Velma Ross—Thayer fancied it vastly more befitting than "Princess Kira"—appeared to unbend. Thayer, watching, saw in her dark eyes a mingled light of affectionate respect and maidenly embarrassment directed toward Yen Chang. He could imagine her saying: "I am quite competent to pick my own husband without the aid of a senile godfather who imagines he has the gift of second sight."

Yen Chang regarded Thayer with his curious almond eyes and nodded his head slightly, as though satisfied of something.

"So everything works out just as it should," he said. "This unexpected crime, of course, complicates Romance, but who shall say it does not add zest? Ah, my children, you blush! It is so always with the young."

Despite his efforts at control, Thayer felt his cheeks stinging. The presumption of the aged man irritated him beyond meas-

ure—yet it was not altogether unpleasant. It was obvious that Yen Chang was in his dotage! A devilishly weak reed for Velma Ross to lean upon in her desperate trouble.

And the girl herself! Her slim hands! The wondrous depths of her eyes—her exquisite profile! Thayer had never met a real princess, but he was certain the blood royal did not carry a finer patrician manner under fire! He tried to quiet his thoughts.

"This man who was killed—who is he?"

"A Hollander; Gustav Van Hoorn," Velma told him.

"A dealer in wild animals," put in Yen Chang. "He has a New York office, but he has been following the show on the pretext of negotiating a sale with the owner. Actually, the man—the swine—has been obsessed with the idea of possessing the daughter of John Ross!"

The Chinese's eye snapped wickedly. Marvin Thayer, on a long chance, tried the old police trick of an unexpected accusation.

"Is that why you killed him?" he demanded, like a shot, of Yen Chang.

The saturnine face was as immobile as granite.

"Had I youth and the full possession of mental and physical energies I would have slain him weeks ago," said Yen Chang deliberately. "I would have accomplished the public benefaction—as I might crush a beetle. That pleasure was denied me: I know not how Van Hoorn came to his death—nor by whose hand."

However adept Marvin Thayer might have been at reading character, he knew that it was beyond him to penetrate the collected mask of the Oriental. Yen Chang might or might not have told the truth. Thayer tried another tack.

"You have an agile mind, Yen Chang. In your opinion—how could the murder have been committed without Miss Ross seeing the murderer?"

"You ask what I cannot answer. I am not a solver of puzzles."

"But surely you have an idea—you suspect some one?"

"If I could help"—Yen Chang was

deadly in earnest—"I would be only overcome with the pleasure. In my own country I am accounted a wise man, but now that I need wisdom—" He paused, tapped his skull beneath his round silk cap. "Here, something has slowed down.

"Dimly, I sensed that blood was to be shed. When I selected you in the multitude I was *guided*. That is all I know. You are young, strong—you know the ways of your people. You must not fail. Yet—if you should there is a remedy. Of life not much remains for Yen Chang on this sphere.

"It is my desire to die on my native soil; to rest beside my people. That is tradition—the blood. Yet, so be it you fail—so be it the daughter of John Ross is in jeopardy, I, Yen Chang, shall confess murder."

Velma Ross gave a little gasp of protesting horror.

"Madness!" she cried. "Under no circumstances!"

"By George, no!" exclaimed Thayer. "I'll give you credit for a sporting idea—but it can't be done, old chap!"

Yen Chang's lids closed slowly. He had nothing further to say.

The fruitless silence that followed was crashed through by the rude pealing of Marvin Thayer's door bell. Startled to his feet, Marvin's mind leaped to a quick, inevitable conclusion.

"It may be the police!" he said swiftly under his breath. "You two—into the dining room at the rear, quickly!" Yen Chang and Velma rose.

"I'll face them," said the girl quietly. Thayer placed a hand on her arm; thrilled at the contact with its firm roundness.

"You go in there and wait," he said. "Leave this to me. I'll do what seems best. And don't worry."

Full in the eyes she gave him a look of complete confidence and gratitude. "I won't try to thank you," she said softly. "It isn't a thing that can be put into words." Then she and Yen Chang left the room.

The man who entered at Thayer's invitation from the outer hall bored at the newspaper man with a brazen stare, although

his cold, pale eyes gave the impression of constant shifting. In age he was something less than fifty—stocky, with a face graven deeply with harsh lines. A certain vividness of clothing stamped him, somehow, as part of the carnival outfit.

"Mr. Thayer," he said bloodlessly, "can I talk to you privately?"

"You can. What is it?"

Without waiting for an invitation the visitor sat down and laid his straw hat on the floor beside the chair.

"I'm Gargan—John Gargan, proprietor in chief of the Great Gargan Shows. You've heard of me, I guess. Mr. Thayer—there was a man murdered on my carnival lot to-night." His fishy gaze never left Thayer's face.

"Murdered!" Thayer was not much as an actor.

"Don't stall," said Gargan. "You know more about it than I do—too much, I might say, for your own good. Listen. I'm here to make you a sensible proposition. You can help me and I can help you."

Thayer grinned coldly. "I wasn't aware that I stood in need of any help. However—what's the idea?"

Gargan's eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"You'll get the idea all right, all right when I spring it. To-night around eleven o'clock I was going about my business looking over things on the lot and I saw you outside the Princess Kira concession.

"I know who you are—you was leaving your office to-day when I was down at your advertising counter putting in the copy for my display ad in to-morrow's paper. The girl at the counter told me you was the editor and owner.

"Fair enough. Now look here—I saw the princess run out of the tent and I saw you go in. That looked mighty funny to me and I watched—see? It's my show—get that? My show! Well, you turns out the light and ducks. You know what I done? I goes in the tent myself to see what's up. And I sees. It's between you and the princess which one killed Gus Van Hoorn!"

Gargan paused. If he expected Marvin Thayer to show any signs of nervousness he was sorely disappointed.

"Go on with what you have to say," said that young man with dispassionate poise—or so it appeared.

"I don't say for a minute, my boy, but what you're absolutely innocent—absolutely. But I do say you're in a damn bad hole. If they ever get me on the witness stand, believe me, I'm not going to flirt with perjury. I'm going to come clean.

"Now—there's a way out of all this. It's a cinch. I'm not going to kid you. If this thing ever gets out it 'll bust me—flat. That's the angle I look at. I've got ten more weeks booked—fair dates, sweet spots. If I go through I'll clean up big.

"But there's this against me: the carnival business is in awfully wrong all over the country. We're legitimate ourselves, but the grifters that trail along with us. Con men—the sure thing boys. They're raw! Every year it's getting tougher and tougher for us. Some places bar us out altogether. They won't let us light. Other places we're on probation, and the first time we make a wise crack—out!

"Mebbe we cut in on the soft dough and mebbe we don't. Sometimes the mayor and the sheriff get theirs, understand? But the dates I got lined up for the balance of the season, they're all sweet and juicy—but suspicious of us, see? And if it ever comes off that a guy was bumped off in one of our tents they'll figure us as hoodlums and meet us at the city limits with the local militia. And I'm the fall guy, 'cause it's my dough that's in the caravan. All the little red wagons belong to John Gargan!"

Thayer nodded. "I see your point of view."

"Are you willing to take a chance—for our mutual benefit?" the showman asked suddenly.

"What kind of a chance?"

"You got a car downstairs, ain't you?"

"I have."

"Well, nobody knows about this job—yet. And they ain't going to if I can help it. You don't want to stand any trial or get mixed up in this publicly, either. Begin to see my point?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, listen. I've got fourteen show

cars on a siding and on the next track there's a string of empty freights due to pull out at 2 A.M. We can pick up this stiff in your car—you and me—and put him in one of the freights. They'll find him next week hundreds of miles from here. If they ever identify him it'll look like he was killed by hobos. It takes a little nerve, but it's worth it—to you especially!"

IV.

THE bold lawlessness of John Gargan's proposition provoked no recoil of feeling on the part of Marvin Thayer. In the brief space of two hours too much had happened. Until this night his life had been placid, but now! A mysterious Chinese, a prophecy of a bride, a murder—the unexpected advent of an enigmatic but fascinating girl under his own roof!

His head had a swirling sensation as he reviewed the past in fleeting retrospection. It was all tame and tasteless—his conventional upbringing. His chief desire had been to make a financial and professional success in life, yet when some deep spring of chivalry in his nature had been touched, he found himself casually weighing the merits of John Gargan's illegal scheme.

"Do you know that what you suggest is a crime—that it is called accessory after the fact, and that, in a murder case, it carries with it a penitentiary sentence?" he asked the carnival proprietor. "We would be laying ourselves liable to a prison sentence."

Gargan waved a heavy hand in the air, as though to dismiss the suggestion of danger.

"We won't get caught," he asserted positively. "There's only one watchman on the ground, and I gave him a bottle of hooch. He's dead drunk and asleep by now. The rest—roustabouts and all—sleep over in the railroad coaches."

The older man looked at Thayer with a mingled expression of curiosity and suspicion. "How'd you get mixed up in this thing, anyhow, bub?" he asked.

Thayer shrugged his shoulders and did not answer. Gargan might, or might not, be a safe person. Time would decide.

"They're an odd pair," Gargan confided in him. The man was hard and cold and the effort at geniality came with difficulty. "Came on the show a couple of months ago from God knows where. I was suspicious of the Chink from the first. I've had 'em before and they're all peculiar. But, Lord—old Yen Chang's a *showman*! Their tent gets top money all the time. Kira's a nice little dame—quiet, well-behaved. You'd never know she was on the show!"

If Gargan were beginning to thaw, Thayer determined to get every scrap of information he could.

"Who do you think killed Van Hoorn?" he asked his visitor.

"I don't know. You and Kira was the last people with him."

"Neither of us did it, Gargan. That's straight. Tell me—did he have any enemies?"

"The Chink, mebbe. Van Hoorn was chasing after Kira all the time."

"Do you think Yen Chang did it?"

Gargan closed one eye. "You know as much about it as I do. Chances are he did—if Kira didn't. But what's the difference? You and me—we'll be the goats unless we get rid of the body. You don't pine to stand trial for murder, do you?"

As a matter of fact, Marvin Thayer was thinking not at all about himself. It was Velma Ross alone who mattered. In the very core of his being he believed in her innocence, her fineness—despite the tawdry career she was following.

The murder, in view of the complexity of its mysterious circumstances, seemed past all solution. He had neither a clew as to the murderer nor a convincing motive. Offhand, he refused to believe Yen Chang guilty—although the fact that Van Hoorn was stricken by an invisible hand might seem to link up in some way with the tricky magic of the Oriental.

Bulking larger than all else in Marvin Thayer's consciousness was the desire to shield Velma—to extricate her somehow from the damning circumstances. In Gargan's proffered idea the way appeared clear, although it went against Thayer's grain to do anything outside the pale of the law.

Had he alone been concerned he would have gone instantly to the police and told everything. With the girl involved it was another matter. The authorities would bungle everything. She'd be arrested—probably convicted. The bare thought was like an icy plunge to Thayer.

"All right, Gargan," he said shortly. "Let's go!"

The showman sighed with relief. "I knowed you see the light," he said heartily. "You ain't no fool."

From a drawer in his library table Marvin Thayer extracted an automatic—showed it to Gargan and slipped it into a hip pocket.

"No—I'm no fool, Gargan," he said quietly, "so don't try to play me for one. I'm taking you at your word that you're on the level. Don't try to cross me or there'll be trouble—suddenly."

"How could I cross you?" demanded Gargan—a trace of nervousness in his voice.

"The minute we get Van Hoorn's body into my car—suppose you had somebody planted near by. A witness or a cop. Suppose you were trying to protect the murderer; well, you might be piling up enough circumstantial evidence to soak me. I don't know you and I'm taking a big chance. Now, if you've got anything like that on your mind—watch out. That's all!"

It was a magnificent bluff. To a reasonable extent Marvin Thayer was capable of romantic folly, yet he actually did not contemplate adding idiotically to that folly. Nevertheless, Gargan seemed to take him at his word.

"I get you," said the showman. "There won't be any double-crossing. I don't do business that way."

Thayer imagined that Velma and Yen Chang could hear what was being said—was fearful lest the girl should come into the room and forbid him going through with the scheme. It was dirty business, and he knew that it must revolt her—even as he was revolted. A secondary apprehension concerned Gargan. Thayer did not want the man to know that Velma and her Godfather were in his apartment. For an excuse he said:

"Go downstairs, Gargan, and wait in the

car. It's in front of the door. I want to telephone a friend—in case anything should happen to me."

When the other had left, Thayer brought Velma and Yen Chang again into the living room. As he expected, they had heard all.

"It's a poor makeshift of a plan, but I'm going to take it," he said firmly. Yen Chang nodded approvingly.

The light that flamed in the girl's eyes endeared her more than ever to Marvin Thayer.

"I cannot let you!" she cried. "We—Yen Chang and I—have dragged you this far into trouble and it must stop. I'd rather give myself up to the police and have it over with, rather than—" She faltered in her speech; went on: "Besides, suppose Gargan himself killed Van Hoorn! He'd sacrifice you in a minute. You can't afford the risk. But even if Gargan told the truth—even then you would be soiling your hands with murder—a part of the stigma would cling to you. No, it can't be!"

It was a long speech and left her breathless, so emotional had she become in delivering it. Her eyes were shining with the intensity of her feelings; her face was pale. Thayer saw her as a beautiful, excited child at bay—a finely strung creature to be soothed; to be taken into arms and quieted softly. It was a thought that set his heart pounding, and quickly he put it out of his head.

"There's no turning back now," he said firmly.

"There's nothing I can say that will stop you?" Her voice, her eyes, pleaded with him. Grimly his jaw tightened.

"Not a thing. I'm sorry."

Their wills battled, but because he was stronger Velma Ross gave way, mastered, overpowered. With a gesture of futility she sank into a chair.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked with surprising meekness.

"Wait here until I get back. The thing, of course, is distasteful, but it has its advantages."

The voice of Yen Chang was like oil. "Assuredly," said the aged Chinese. "It is the only thing possible."

Leaving the building Thayer discovered that the rain had ceased. Gargan awaited him in the car, and now, by their joint efforts, they managed to get up the top that had balked earlier in the night.

"With the top up we're just that much safer from anybody seeing us," the showman had said.

It was long past midnight and the car rolled almost silently through the sleeping town upon its grisly mission. Within a few minutes they were at the carnival grounds. In hushed tones John Gargan rehearsed once more the exact details of the plan.

"We'll drive right up against the entrance of Kira's tent and get—it—into the car. Better shut off all your lights, but keep the engine running. It won't be so easy to put it in the freight car. You'll have to drive over some rough ground by the tracks, but it's our good luck that the freight stands on the first tracks. I'll go ahead when we get to the train an' see that the coast's clear. Savvy?"

Thayer understood. The car had stopped outside the grounds, which were practically in darkness. Gargan had lied, Thayer decided, about the place being deserted. His reason told him that so much property would not be left unprotected. Beyond doubt there were some people sleeping in the silent tents. Gargan, in order to induce him to accept the plan, had tried to make it seem less dangerous.

Into the midway of the carnival, strewn with confetti sodden and discolored by the rain, the roadster felt its darkened, purring way. Apparently none of the carnival people were awake. Of the watchman they saw not a sign.

At the door of Kira's tent Thayer slid the car cautiously to a halt.

"We ought to have a flashlight," suggested Gargan as they alighted. Rummaging in a side pocket of the roadster, Thayer found one.

Gargan pushed through the tent entrance first. Thayer was at his heels. Not until they were inside did he push the button of the flashlight, shading the glowing end with his hand prudently.

The blurred circle of light rested, first, at their feet, and then, hesitatingly, Marvin

Thayer slid it toward the spot where he dreaded to look.

A grating, unintelligible ejaculation that was expressive of both surprise and alarm came from John Gargan's lips.

"It's—it's gone!" he cried, aghast.

V.

THAYER, by now, had a calloused feeling, so far as the unexpected was concerned. Merely his head swam for an instant at the shock of this new surprise, and then his brain cleared.

"The game's up," he said, resignedly. "Somebody's found him. I suppose the police and the coroner have been here and gone."

An ashen pallor of disappointment settled upon Gargan's features.

"Just my luck!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I suppose they've got Kira and Yen Chang pinched by now. Now comes the scandal and ruined business for the Gargan Shows." He cursed softly, earnestly.

Thayer shot his light rapidly around the tent. So far as he could make out nothing had been disturbed.

"Wait!" he cried suddenly. "The police haven't been here at all. I'll bet my life on that!"

"You think they haven't, eh?" Gargan rejoined cynically.

"The chances are ten to one they haven't. Look!" Thayer centered his light at the far edge of the tent. "Somebody unfastened the floor hook and dragged the body out at the rear. By George! There's even a tiny smear of blood on the canvas. If it had been the cops they'd have taken him out at the regular entrance."

The evidence to support his theory was convincing. Gargan followed it dumfoundedly.

"Good God, ain't there no limit at all to this thing?" he demanded in awe.

Slowly an understanding joyousness began to shine on Marvin Thayer's face: a wild, happy surging tore at his heart. Carried away, he whaled Gargan an enthusiastic wallop on the back.

"Thank Heaven!" he burst out. "This

clears Kira! Now I know how Van Hoorn was killed!"

"You—you know how—" Gargan's voice shook—whether with excitement or some subtle dread, the young newspaper man was unable to decide. Cautiously he decided not to expose his hand—what he had learned in the previous instant.

"Oh, I just had a wild idea, that's all," said Thayer, with sudden evasiveness.

Gargan turned up the collar of his coat. "All right!" Whatever he might have felt was masked behind a new air of gruffness. "I'm going over and go to sleep. Better keep your trap shut, young man. Good night."

Left alone, Marvin Thayer lingered in the tent. Thrusting his head out through the flap, he watched John Gargan tramping through the thickening mud in the direction of the carnival train.

With no one to interrupt him, the young newspaper man returned to his clew with the zest of a professional detective. The thrill, the satisfaction of it, made his mouth dry.

Cut in the side of the tent—at the height of a man's shoulders—was a short gash, the width, perhaps, of a long-bladed clasp knife!

More—at its edges was a tinge of discoloration. Blood! With swift-working imagination, Thayer visualized what had happened. Van Hoorn, arrogantly, had leaned his broad back against the canvas. Some one, from without, had plunged a blade into the tempting target. Even as the knife was withdrawn—as the body pitched forward—a spurt of blood had followed the blade and stained the fabric ever so slightly.

And Velma, in panic, had fled! Tenderness overpowered Marvin Thayer. He would rush to her; tell her of his discovery and soothe her fears. The thing would become public, of course. The thought brought with it a sympathetic wince. With the influence of his newspaper behind him he could force a quick disposal of the case; could reduce the resultant notoriety to the minimum! And then? There rose up within him a chilling recollection of his own staid upbringing.

"You're a damn snob and a rotter!" he told himself, heatedly. "You'd be ashamed to have the folks know her. You're not big enough to forget—"

Forget what? With a deep sense of shame Marvin Thayer was forced to admit to himself that he felt the past of Velma Ross to be sordid. Had she been an actress, even. But a fortune teller—a faker—with a carnival! Conservative tradition ran strong in his veins.

Thayer was not namby-pamby. His past had been as wild as the average man's. But the women of his family had been spotless. That was it—spotless! The soul torment of an aching passion that would not be stilled gripped him with icy fingers of misery.

With his fists clenched until the nails cut into his palms, he sat down on one of the rattan chests, turned off his flashlight, and, alone and in the darkness, gave himself up to the bitter inward struggle between social prejudices and something else that was mysterious and divine.

The rain, once more, began to patter on the sloping roof of the tent. For summer, the night was cool—almost chilly—yet Thayer found it necessary to drag out a handkerchief and wipe his brow. Scarcely aware of his actions, he lit a cigarette, puffed twice, and threw it away, only to light another immediately.

All realization of time passed from his mind. A nausea seized him, and he sunk his face into his palms. From time to time he gulped, harsh and feverishly. Emotions, torn, twisted, and inflamed, paralyzed his sense until he was aware of nothing but the pangs of his two natures in deadly combat.

The sound of stealthy footsteps entering the tent did not reach his ears. His eyes were now staring straight ahead, yet they did not register the outline of the form that lurked in the almost impenetrable gloom. Neither hearing nor seeing, Marvin Thayer, normally, might have caught the faint, sweetish odor that clung to the newcomer—a pungency of nicotine and brandy. As it was, his sense of smell was totally dormant.

The heavy, leaden blow of a blackjack

descended swiftly toward his head, but in the darkness it missed, scraped the side of his skull and ended, an aching blot of pain, on his shoulder.

The physical shock brought Thayer out of his deep lethargy; released a wire-taut accumulation of nervous and muscular energy. Head downward, he plunged forward with the instinctive dive of a football tackler. Even as he felt the impact of his body with another, he realized that his right arm and shoulder were useless—numb from the heavy blow.

The assailant, snakelike, slipped out of the encircling left arm, and the two men struck the carpeted stage. In the darkness Thayer had not the faintest idea who the other was; scarcely cared. Vaguely, he had a feeling that in some way he was now battling—in some inexplicable fashion—on behalf of Velma Ross.

Beyond that his brain did not function. Sensing the location of whoever was pitted against him, he swung a hooklike blow with his left fist—felt it glance off a scalp.

His antagonist rolled toward him, entangled him, clutched at his throat. The fingers sank into Thayer's flesh like talons. With his free hand the newspaper man reached up and got one of the wrists in his grasp. It was slender, for a man's, but with the tenacity of steel—a strength of nerve force rather than sinews.

Applying power, Thayer got one of the strangling hands loose, the nails ripping his skin as they clawed away. After the first startled moment of surprise he had no doubt of the outcome.

The straining contact, body to body, assured him he was the stronger; that the unknown was fighting on energy alone; that inevitably he must succumb to superior force, even though diminished by the impotency of one useless arm.

Thayer's left hand, capable of gripping with the power of a vise, progressed toward his assailant's throat. The fingers felt a stiff collar, moved above it and contracted slowly, with irresistible pressure.

One hand of the man who had begun the attack roved about the rug, found what it sought. The stringy muscles hardened; there was a convulsive jerk and the shot-

filled leather weapon smashed against the side of Marvin Thayer's head. Only the crumpled felt of his hat broke the blow; saved him from a fractured skull.

A vast enveloping darkness descended. The men fell apart, and the victor, breathing in gasps, struggled to his feet—fumbled in his clothes for a cigarette to quiet his jumping nerves.

After an incomprehensible lapse of time, Thayer was sickened by a throbbing, tearing pain on the inside of his head. With his fogged consciousness he sought to fathom the why of it. Against his face something cold and wet dashed in a stream.

"Rain," he muttered torpidly.

He was lying on a soft, sticky bed; his hands were in it, and gathering power to reason, he knew it to be mud.

Gradually he became cognizant of a pain below his knees; around his ankles. By summoning all energy he was able to shift his head—to see in the obscure light.

Some one was at his feet, binding something that cut like wire. The sharp pain of it increased, stimulated him into a fuller sensibility. Trying to kick loose, his bonds bit deeper.

Whoever it was at his feet cursed him in a raspy voice. "Little good your kickin' does, damn you!"

Thayer attempted to sit up. The figure pushed him back viciously. "Lay still, can't you?"

Ever so distantly the voice sounded, yet there was in it a certain quality that was, somehow, reminiscent of another time and place. Thayer tried to recall—failed.

"Where am I—what's goin' on?" he managed to ask, feebly.

His captor chuckled wickedly. The job of tying Thayer's feet was complete, and he lit a cigarette, and squatted back on his haunches with the protected light of the match illuminating his features.

It was the spieler from the front of the Princess Kira's tent—the hatchet-faced youth in the checkered suit.

"You're on the bank of the river, my friend, with a rock wired to your feet. An' as soon as I get my second wind—in you go! The Dutchman an' you can play tag with the fish!"

His voice broke—ended in a cackle. Memory, white hot, came back to Marvin Thayer. The murdered man—*Velma Ross*—and now—

The huddled figure filled its lungs with cigarette smoke; laughed softly in an eerie staccato timbre.

"I got you, too! Just like I got him—just like what I said I would! Come hangin' around my tent, will you? Not no more you won't!"

"You're insane!" gasped Thayer.

"Sure—I'm crazy, like a fox. That's good! Say, it took a damn smart man to fix the Dutchman like I did. The skunk! God, but he was heavy! Dragged him by the feet—one in each hand—like a horse between shafts!"

Thayer sought to control his voice; to retain calmness even though he shook in every fiber with the horror of his situation. Weakened with his injuries, bound, he realized he was no physical match for the murderer. A vision of *Velma Ross* passed through his mind, and he knew he could not give up trying for freedom until the river water closed over his head.

"You did a clever job with Van Hoorn," he said in the conciliatory tone one adopts toward a child, or a madman; "but, look here, you've made a mistake with me. I am—"

The bedraggled youth shivered; laughed bitterly.

"Don't try to hand me any alibi, kid. I seen you—and I listened, too. You was makin' a play for Kira—oh, I'm wise! An' she was fallin'. Come back to the tent, did you? Damn a woman! They're all crooked!"

A swelling rage possessed Marvin Thayer. "You rat!" he choked out, heedless of consequences.

"*Rat! Rat!*" There was a hysterical ring in the other's voice. "Damn it all—she's my *wife!* Get that—my *wife!*"

To Marvin Thayer, suddenly, life seemed a useless possession. The strength that had begun to flow once more throughout his young, vigorous body, ebbed out. Stunned in mind and heart and body, his eyelids fluttered, closed. It was the end. The Thayer women were spotless.

Out of the void a dim voice was speaking. Now, there was a sob in it.

"Run off once with a travelin' man—that's what started me on the dope route—I'd 'a' owned my own show—if she'd been on the level—too good lookin'—made a sucker outa me—outa Jack Riley—Smilin' Jack, they used to call me—"

There was silence. After a time Jack Riley resumed, insistently, as a man who has repeated the same thing to himself thousands of times.

"Her nature's weak—that's all—likes to pretend—not bad at heart—but I wouldn't harm *her*—only the damn vultures what hang round—"

In his youth man does not die without a struggle, even when cut to the heart—when stricken to the soul. The sheer animal in Marvin Thayer began to assert itself, to protest. Slowly the vital current began to permeate his racked body. *Velma* was weak—liked to pretend. He recalled her with that look of a child at bay in her eyes. Perhaps it was not love he felt; perhaps it was only a great protective desire!

Silently Thayer computed his resources, estimated his chances from escaping death. Least of all, he counted upon out-talking Jack Riley. Reason, he knew, was the poorest weapon against obsession. Bound, weakened with injury, he had not the physical strength to conquer the other.

Then up from the subconscious memory came to his aid. Craftily he maneuvered his stiff, aching body until his fingers closed on the comforting metal of his automatic, forgotten in his hip pocket since he had displayed it to dissuade John Gargan from possible treachery.

It would have been perfectly easy to kill Jack Riley with a single shot, but Thayer had no such intention. It was not necessary.

Lying flat on his back, he sent one shot at close range into the knee of Riley. The man screamed, cursed, slid over on his side in the mud, clutching wildly at shattered bone and flesh.

Thayer lifted himself to a sitting posture and swiftly unwound the wire about his ankles. At the sight of the heavy stone attached he shuddered.

Upon his feet once more he marveled at his powers of recuperation. Barring a throbbing in his head and the chill of the rain he felt as strong as ever.

"How'd you get me here?" he demanded of Riley. "Carry me?"

"I drove your car," moaned the other. "It's over in the bushes." Pain had robbed him of his egregious self-assurance. "Get a doctor—quick! I'm bleedin' to death!"

Thayer jammed the pistol back into his pocket, bent over and lifted the writhing form in his arms. Beneath his loud suit Jack Riley was a whimpering rack of bones—no heavier than a boy of fourteen.

Despite his repugnance for the man, Marvin Thayer made what haste was possible; lugged him to the car and drove with reckless speed toward police headquarters.

Captain Anderson, behind the wicket of the desk in the outer office, raised his gray head—blank astonishment on his face as the two dripping, mud-spattered scarecrows pushed through the door, the one carrying the other.

"What in the h—" The words died on his lips. "*Mr. Thayer!*" For a moment he disbelieved his eyes, utterly.

"Get a doctor for this chap, captain. And for me—if you've got it—a stiff drink of something that's against the law!"

Captain Anderson waved a gaping sergeant to the door.

"Beat it around the corner to the emergency hospital! Bring back a stretcher—and somethin' for Mr. Thayer! Come on—git that lead out of your feet!"

Deftly the beardless young police surgeon ripped off the trouser leg high above the knee, snipping it part way and tearing it the rest. At the sight of the wound he whistled.

"Patella smashed—ten to one the external tibial surface of the femur, too!" The lingo of his profession tripped easily from his lips. "Infection in the synovial cavity practically certain!"

His thin hands ran over the slender form of Jack Riley. "Malnutrition."

Slipping the bell of a stethoscope onto the naked breast he listened intently.

"Tachycardia—pronounced valvular lesion!" A frown corrugated his brow. "Damn it all—that leg ought to come off. And he can't stand an anæsthetic! Damn!"

Beckoning Thayer and the police captain aside, he translated the situation into understandable English. Fragmentarily, the surgeon knew that there was some sort of a murder case involved.

"Get his story right away, cap," he advised. "This is a nasty case—he was about gone, anyway. Punk heart. I've got only an even break to pull him through. You can count on fever and delirium. Better rout out a stenographer—now!"

Captain Anderson nodded; crossed to the enameled table that bore the frail body of Smiling Jack Riley. Soothingly, with surprising tenderness, he made the wounded man understand. A quietness settled upon the patient. When he spoke he was scarcely irrational.

Bit by bit—pausing to gather strength—he told the story of his life; the career of the wanderer, the wise guy, the vice and the glamour of the red and gilt wagons.

"Kira! God—she ruined me!" Flame crept into his voice; into his eyes. Thayer—to steady himself as he listened—gripped at the back of a chair until his knuckles showed white.

The story seared in his ears, but he forced himself to remain; even to sympathize with the pallid youth breathing out his tragedy. Of the murder and the attempt upon Thayer's life there was no hint of evasion. With a wild ring in his thin voice Jack Riley made a clean breast of his delusion and his folly.

When he had finished the police officer turned to Thayer and the surgeon. "Try to remember exactly what he told. It may not be exactly as legal a confession—but it's probably the best we can get!"

For a moment the three backs were turned toward Riley. A clink of a thin silver chain, a sigh of satisfaction, sounded. From the gaudy waistcoat, hanging pendulously toward the floor, swung something metallic and cylindrical—something with a hairlike needle point.

The cuff on one of the arms of Smiling Jack Riley was pushed back nearly to the

elbow; out of the myriad of red dots on his arm, one stood out more crimson than the rest.

"That's the last shot," murmured the wreck. "I been savin' the big one for—for the blow-off!"

From out of the depths of an interior pocket of his coat he produced a glazed post card—the photograph of a woman's face—young, beautiful, full-lipped.

"Good-by, old girl"—it was a whisper—"and I might-a owned my own show!"

His eyes closed gently; his fingers relaxed. The cheap little picture fell to the floor. Marvin Thayer picked it up.

Despite a resemblance, perhaps, about the eyes, it was not a picture of Velma Ross!

VI.

SHADOWY gray dawn crept into Marvin Thayer's living room, filling it with strips of bleak light. Furniture lost its outlines and became darkish lumps—opaque areas against the leaden coming of day.

From the depths of the heaviest and darkest shadow rose a thin coil of smoke, heavily scented. At the end of the long bamboo stem the tiny bowl of Yen Chang's pipe glowed with the only visible cheer that was in the room. In his old age there remained little save sweet tobacco and philosophy for the venerable seer.

Thayer came in, threw off his coat and dropped limply into a chair. Out of the dusk Yen Chang rose.

"It is finished, my son?"

Thayer assented wearily. "Jack Riley was the man."

Yen Chang packed his tobacco affectionately with the tip of his little finger. "He is dead—" It was half a question, half an assertion.

"What makes you think that?" Something near to irritation—the fruit of overwrought nerves—was in the query.

A hand, incredibly fragile, moved deprecatingly in the air. "It matters not. On this sphere little save his husk remained. Dreamer of mad dreams, prey of delusion—in another place—another time—he shall come into his own. It is the way."

"Can she hear us?" Thayer asked.

"No, my son."

"Tell me, Yen Chang, you must have known his delusion about her—why did you allow him to stay?"

"It was for money—oh, you of the foolish fears. Did he not bring much silver to our tent—double the part of any other. His was the showman's instinct—base, perhaps—but true."

The voice of Marvin Thayer was muffled with feeling.

"God—why did you drag her through all this? Money! Was that your repayment to her father—your friend—to badger his child through the rag-tag, bob-tail of the vilest, the lowest—"

Yen Chang did not speak, but there emanated from him some force, wordless, yet potent. Without knowing why, Thayer broke off suddenly.

"Am I the Almighty, my son? Where wisdom abides there is the purse-light. What need had I—alone—for silver, or gold? Did I but learn of her distress that I came. Knowest though she was as safe as an infant in my care? With me, did she not prosper? Ah—not for self. She needed more than unskilled hands could earn. Heed thou: this child you fear has been defiled by the caravan of mountebank and charlatan—for herself a pittance. She did not tell you of a sister to be nurtured back to health—of a frail one—the slender rose—"

Thayer got to his feet; crossed the room and put his hand apologetically upon Yen Chang's shoulder.

"Forgive me, old chap—but you don't understand. You see, I come from an old conservative family, and—well, maybe I'm not quite as broad-minded as I might be. Those things hurt, just a little. But, after all, they don't matter in the long run, do they?"

The narrow shoulders of Yen Chang contracted in a shrug.

"Caste! Son, it is a devil idea. Can you purify your heart of it? If not, I warn you, it will rise and strike you—will cut down your happiness in the years to come."

"My heart is rid of all that foolishness, Yen Chang." Thayer trembled like a boy.

"This thing has come to me like a miracle and I—and I—"

"All of this I foresaw," said Yen Chang with the stately dignity now of a mandarin. "To-day my work is at the end. Time presses and I must not tarry. Old Mother China is calling. Can you steel your heart to great grief?"

The glistening eyes of the old man, like polished stones, fixed upon the youth. Under their spell Thayer paled with a quick, nameless apprehension.

"To great grief?" he repeated numbly.

"To an immensity of sorrow beside which all else is trivial."

"Yen Chang—*what is it?*"

"It is, my son, the most profound realization that can come to man. That which we possess cannot be loved to the fullest. A man loves most what he has lost. Only then are the depths of his soul touched. Seest thou a man with his adored one about? Mark how little he feels—how little he is conscious of them. Mark you the same man when he stands alone, empty forsaken. Until a man has lost love he knows it not."

Quivering, Thayer stepped back, seeking to penetrate the immobile mask of the saffron face. Yen Chang extended a hand.

"Good-by!"

Like a yellow leaf the hand lay in the strong American palm. Thayer ran a dry tongue over dry lips.

"Look here, you can't go away like this!" he cried. "Holy smoke! One thing and another—"

"Let your heart be as steel, my son."

Thayer was dead white. His voice sunk to a whisper.

"Where is she?"

The eyes of Yen Chang roved toward another room; for the first time a tingling warmth passed from his palm to the young man's.

"Farewell," he said with a lingering fondness on the word. It was the last time Marvin Thayer saw his calm, ancient face or heard the unction of his voice.

With a leap the young man gained the other room—a study behind his living room. A shaded lamp burned on a mahogany desk, vieing faintly with the dull light of day. Composed as for sleep, Velma Ross lay—

waxen white—upon Thayer's leather couch. Across her breast her hands were crossed.

The breath, in a great shuddering gasp, left his body. At the base of his scalp the hair began to stiffen. At his heart a clawing pain raked with frigid barbs. Strength departed, and the feet of Marvin Thayer carried him forward slowly as each step was wrenched from the floor.

Silently he dropped to his knees. Tremulous fingers closed over the cold, still hands. His bloodless lips moved:

"Until a man has lost love he knows it not!"

The head of Velma Ross, coiled round with its dark lustrousness, lay upon a great silken pillow of purple. With dry, glistening eyes he sought to photograph every feature upon his memory that he might, in the dreary years to come, forget not one lineament.

After a time he kissed her on the marbled forehead. His voice came back to him and he spoke to her, ineffably tender:

"Dear, somewhere you must hear what I say. Somewhere in the big out there—somewhere there's a place where things come out all right. Wait—oh, my darling—only wait!"

How long he remained he never knew. Nor what he said. Alone, on his knees, Marvin Thayer waited for he knew not what. Presently the light brightened in the room and he became aware, gradually, that the damp murk of dawn had given way to the full brilliance of the morning sun.

Rising to his feet he stood at the window, looking out at the every-day activity of Oakenburg. A milk wagon clattered down the street. A postman passed with a whistle in his mouth. On the other side of the street a boy romped along with a dog. An automobile turned a corner. Life went on—empty, meaningless.

"Odd—the sun still shines," he muttered. "It looks just the same, but it isn't. It's not the same old world—"

An artificial calmness—an outward acceptance of patent facts—came back, and Thayer walked into the living room.

"Yen Chang!" he called, and in the same moment he knew it was useless. The Chinese had gone.

A clock on the wall chimed softly—ten, eleven soft notes. The housekeeper would be coming in any minute. There would be explanations. Difficult ones. It was curious—the things which only before had seemed so important vanished. People would talk. It did not matter—not in the slightest.

Marvin Thayer looked back. Youth, as he had known it, was gone. Ahead there was but a vacant, blighted future. The idea of suicide came to him, but instantly he put it aside. Somehow he must stick to the game—must play the hand dealt him—without cheating.

A brief fragment of privacy remained to him, and to her. He returned to the room where she lay and sat down beside her—first drawing the curtains. The softened glow of the electric lamp poured gently on the features of Velma Ross. Reverently Thayer felt her cheek with his hand. It was like cold silk.

Once more he tried to speak to her; felt the urge to put into words the elusive, pleasant pain that ran through his being. His voice was husky, inarticulate. Physically he had all of his faculties, but there were no words in him—nothing.

Then—Velma Ross opened her eyes!

Strangely enough it seemed perfectly natural. Muddled to the core, Marvin Thayer reasoned feebly: Life is an illusion—why not death? The thought brought him a big joy that swept through every nerve. Subconsciously he warned himself that he was deluded, but there was a sweetness in this realm where the real and the unreal were inextricably tangled.

Velma Ross smiled, with her eyes bright and shining like a child's in the morning. A tinge of color mounted slowly to her face—her lithe young body stretched in an abandonment of luxury.

"Hello!" she said in a soft, round voice.

Marvin Thayer extended his hand and she placed both tiny ones in his.

"It's a glorious dream, isn't it?" he said in hushed tones that he might not wake himself out of it.

"Gorgeous! Only it's strange—most dreams fade out. Why! You're as clear and real as though you actually existed!"

"Tell me all you dreamed," he implored.

Velma rubbed her eyes; curled up like a kitten.

"I'm not ashamed to, because—well, just because I'm not. I thought I was a girl who used to go around with a carnival and tell people's fortunes. Only, of course, I really couldn't. And there was a lovely old Chinaman I'd known forever and ever and he was wonderfully good to me and always kept promising he'd bring me a real Prince Charming.

"And that was you! Then there was a terrible man, but he got killed and we came here. You were here, too, but you went away, and I thought you couldn't possibly love me."

Thayer smiled; shook his head. "That was a mistake; that last," he interrupted, "I can, and do."

Velma felt herself blushing and put her hands to her flaming cheeks.

"Funny, isn't it, how embarrassed one can feel in their sleep?" she said happily. "But let me go on and finish before I wake up. Yen Chang—that was his name—consoled me and gave me a flower that he had crushed in a little ivory case that he carried somewhere in the folds of his funny silk coat.

"It was an enchanted poppy, he said, and you'll find only one in every ten thousand poppies that grow in China. They are very, very sacred! Well—it had the most wonderful fragrance, and when I inhaled it I got tremendously sleepy and came in here.

"I was asleep, all but my ears. I could hear everything, and when you came in I knew it perfectly. And you thought I was dead. I knew I wasn't, but I couldn't tell you. You were simply heartbroken, and then I knew you loved me. You said—"

The telephone bell rang in another room. Marvin Thayer passed a feverish hand across his forehead.

"Heavens!" he cried. "That's not a dream—that's real!"

The psychological illusion was shattered. The bell rang insistently. Boyishly eager—glowing with the highest hope—Marvin Thayer flung up the window curtain.

"I haven't slept for days and days, it

seems," he explained. "Besides that—I was walloped on the head with a black-jack. Furthermore, I've seen a couple of dead men, a Chinese wonder-worker in action—and the greatest little girl on earth. You'll forgive a little insanity on my part, won't you? Look!"

Wonderingly, befuddled with whatever exotic opiate that Yen Chang in his guile had forced upon her, Velma Ross joined Thayer at the window.

"That's Orchard Street in the thriving little city of Oakenburg, Kansas," he asserted positively. "I'll admit it sounds impossible—but I'll prove it!"

Throwing up a window he whistled to a boy who was dressed in a suit of overalls, and was making his way past the house.

"Hey, son!" he called.

The boy looked up at Thayer with a friendly grin.

"Whatcher want, mister?"

"Catch this!"

A silver quarter spun through the air; jingled musically on the paved street. With a dive the boy had it.

"Throw down another one, mister!" he called up, optimistically. Thayer turned away from the window, drawing Velma Ross close to him.

"Now do you believe it?"

From the depths of the embrace she gurgled happily.

"I'd like to," she admitted.

"Fine," said Marvin Thayer; "that's your job for the rest of your life!"

(The end.)

South of Fifty-Three

Part IV

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "The One Way Street," etc.



CHAPTER XII.

ONE HONEST MAN WARNS ANOTHER.

JONATHAN HAYES, manacled, hobbled and bound to the chair Cook's men had forced him into, managed to meet Cook's complacency with a very fair complacency of his own. "If you hurry, I dare say you can murder me without any interruption, Cook."

"No hurry!" Cook smiled. "No hurry at all. And, my dear chap, I do wish you wouldn't be crude—"

"You'll never find out from me where those sealskins are hid."

"No, Hayes? Really! 'Never' is a long time. Consider. This is a nice, quiet spot, surrounded by something like four or five million people—I think the larger figure is nearer correct. I have taken pains

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that we sha'n't be disturbed here. And, as I said, the chance of interruption from outsiders is *nil*. Really, Hayes, you must understand that the average New Yorker does not go about interfering in other people's business. Civilization has taught him that he has troubles enough managing his own affairs.

"If I choose to, I can murder you by slow torture, or cut you into fine pieces, or boil you in oil, or pick your eyes out, and lop off your fingers, one by one. Not that I would like to do any of those things to you, Hayes. Good gracious, no!"

Cook paused and grinned his thin-lipped, sardonic grin. In the gaslight, his bald head sparsely covered with the wet plastered strands of red hair, the man looked like a vulture—indecent and unclean.

Hayes loathed him.

"I'm not going to tell you anything," he repeated angrily.

"I don't ask it," said Cook.

The helpless man stared and opened his mouth and eyes in comical surprise.

"No. Honestly, Hayes, I brought you her to tell you something. Sounds queer, I suppose, taking all this trouble, but that's my intention. I want you to listen to me. Forget for the minute that you have cause to feel annoyed and cross with me. I am serious. I wonder, Hayes, if you've discovered yet that I am an honest man?"

"You honest!"

Cook was undisturbed by his scorn.

"Yes, I am," he repeated. "As honest as you are—and I want to explain that. Old chap, think a minute. Did you ever have any doubt as to my motives?"

"None," Hayes answered promptly and bitterly. "I always knew you for a murderer and blackleg—"

"Well," Cook said with a shrug, "that's not quite the point. But you always knew I meant to get those sealskins. I never made a secret of that, did I? Didn't I offer you a partnership—"

"In my own sealskins!"

"But you needed me—and need me now, worse than ever you did. I was frank about what I wanted. You were frank in your refusal. *Hayes, that's more than Fox and his crowd are.*"

"What are you getting at?"

"Just this—you're in the hands of crooks and thieves and liars. You, an honest man! Yes, I'm serious about this. As another honest man, I warn you—"

"Warn me!" Hayes wondered if the man was insane.

"Yes, warn you!" Warn you against Douglas Fox and his choice gang of swindlers. You poor innocent, haven't you, even yet, the slightest idea of what they are doing to you—of what their game is? Have you no idea of the way Fox is exploiting you—"

"Cook, are you crazy, or am I? I—this doesn't make any sense. Fox is organizing a company to get the sealskins. What of it?"

"To get the sealskins!" Cook repeated, and laughed with fine sarcasm. "Oh, come—you still believe that?"

"Certainly I believe that! I know—"

"Organizing a company to sell stock, you mean. To sell stock to silly, ignorant, gullible fools. To rob widows and orphans of their savings—to cheat and defraud. You—and the sealskins; do you know what part you play in this? You're the bait—that's all. You're the figurehead, the brass band, the big bass drum that advertises his swindle—that's what you are. And you still maintain this childish belief that Fox is going to send a ship to get your sealskins. Oh, this is good!"

Cook laughed silently and with very good relish.

"You are innocent!" he burst out.

Hayes's face began to redden. He could outface Cook in the matter of defiance, but the attack had taken an unexpected angle that surprised him completely.

"I suppose," Cook sneered, "you thought you came to New York of your own free will? I suppose you still think you are your own master? That you walk down Broadway dressed like a circus horse because you like to play the fool? That you give away a basketful of silly tourist souvenirs every day because you like to play Santa Claus? You do all these things in the belief they have some connection with getting those skins? You're serious about it? Good God!"

Hayes's surprise left him confused. There was something in the way Cook said these things, a conviction of their truth, that made him believe them. Never had he been as completely at the mercy of Cook as this moment. The man's new weapon broke down all his defenses for the time.

Suspicion of Douglas Fox and his associates never had occurred to him before. He had done as they had asked, and done it willingly. Often the things that they made him do seemed idiotic to Hayes, but he was in a new world, in the hands of friends, in Marion's hands. He trusted everything to Marion.

A gull? An ignorant, innocent fool—shown off like a dancing bear on a chain for the amusement of Broadway and to serve some crooked scheme of Douglas Fox's?

He had never thought of that!

Cook had him completely at his mercy. It was in his power to do a great deal with Jonathan Hayes. But Cook made a mistake. He leaned forward and laid his hand on Hayes's knee, a persuasive gesture meant to enforce what he was about to say.

At the touch of Cook's hand something chilled Hayes. The confusion of his thoughts was clarified almost instantly. A great draft of fresh air seemed to blow through his brain, and it blew away the smoke and gases of this newborn doubt of Fox and himself.

"My dear chap," Cook smiled gently, "they have been playing you for a fool! The only question is, will you stand for it, or are you man enough to revolt? You may dislike me—not without some cause—you may distrust me; but admit, at least, I dealt honestly. I never tried to make a fool of you. And I'm willing to offer you the same terms I offered before—a fifty-fifty partnership—if you will show me where those pelts are hid."

It was Hayes's turn to laugh now. "You were a long time coming to that. But you came out just where I looked to find you, Cook."

Cook looked at him sharply, surprised by his change of manner. "What! You don't believe what I have told you?"

"My good, honest man," said Hayes with significant and scornful emphasis, "I do not."

"You will let Fox make a laughing-stock of you? Dress you up like a circus clown, put you through your tricks, and then kick you aside like an old shoe, when he has swindled all the gulls you attract!"

Hayes smiled and shook his head gently. "Cook, you are so transparent with all this stuff! So simple. Fool that I am, even I can see your motive—your wonderful philanthropic desire to take me into partnership and rob me at your leisure. If I were you—"

Cook flushed now. For once he lost his easy manner. He saw he had lost, and it made him rage.

"Fool!" he screamed. "Idiot! Block-head! Oh—you fool! You prefer to let them exploit you—and lose everything!"

"If I were you," Hayes began again, "I'd go back to simple, honest methods that you seem so fond of. Try torturing me if you think that it will get you anything."

"You let them play you for a fool!" Cook shouted. "You'll wear their collar and run around on a chain wherever that flip, painted, yellow-haired—"

"Stop!" Hayes shouted. "I warn you that—"

But Cook was fairly frothing. "A man—a man like you, letting himself be led about! The newest freak pet of a common Broadway show girl, a—"

Hayes was manacled and hobbled and made fast to the chair, but his feet had restricted liberty. He hurled himself, chair and all, upon Cook and bore the captain down on the cot.

The blow deprived Cook of wind for a moment; then he began to struggle, and his fists lashed out. Hayes, perfectly helpless, had to take the blows. He managed to roll over and hide his face.

Cook sprang to his feet then and began to rain blows with better direction. His fingers found Hayes's throat and were choking him.

The men from the hall ran in. They closed in about the struggling figures. Hayes was able to lash out short kicks with

his hobbled feet. He had no other means of defense, and they speedily had him helpless and upright again.

While a man held him at either side Cook stepped up and struck him deliberately in the face. His lips had writhed back, baring his teeth. The man grimaced horribly. For the moment he seemed insane in his fury.

At the blow Hayes lunged again, and his guards were dragged to one side and the other. Cook danced back lightly out of reach, grinning without mirth. The others sprang to help hold the prisoner.

Another sound, loud and insistent, made itself heard and felt above their turmoil. Somewhere in the house a window crashed in, then a second.

In the room they became quickly silent—so silent that they could hear the tinkle of belated fragments of glass, then the sound of heavy footsteps.

A voice from below shouted frantically, screechingly, "Hayes! Hayes!"

Al Sapley's voice!

"Here!" Hayes roared. "Second floor!" Then he lunged again at his captors..

But his captors had something else to think about—their own safety. Cook addressed them briefly. "Get out," he said. The four vanished from the room, finding some exit prepared in advance.

Cook lingered but a moment more to glare at Hayes.

"Some day, Hayes, when you know the truth, you'll realize what an utter damn fool you've been to-day."

Having said that, Cook stepped to the window, threw up its sash, and crawled out. His hands lingered a moment, clinging to the sill, then let go. He had dropped to the roof of a low extension at the rear.

Al Sapley and three armed men burst into the room almost simultaneously.

Hayes roared at Al: "Cook! Out that window!"

"After him, two of you!" Sapley directed.

Hayes saw them hesitate.

"Baldheaded man," he added for their instruction. "Red beard. Short. Now hustle."

They nodded, understanding, and crawled out of the window in pursuit. Sapley

sent his third man after the others, and he himself began to untangle Hayes from the chair, babbling exclamations and questions as he worked. Hayes told him the story briefly as, together, they took part in the hunt for Cook.

Cook had disappeared effectively. In the dark and drizzle, and sheltered by a maze of backyard fences, wagon sheds, junk yards and rookeries, escape was comparatively simple for him. Hayes and Sapley returned empty handed and discouraged to the house. There they found one man of Cook's gang had been arrested, the worst hurt of the lot.

"Just about what I expected!" Sapley declared disgustedly after the prisoner had been cross-questioned. "A cheap gangster, hired for the job. He doesn't know what it's all about and doesn't care. He's working for his fifteen dollars a day and it don't matter to him whether the job is abduction or murder—so long as he gets paid."

"And the girl who brought that note to me?"

"Hired for the job, of course, hired by Cook."

"You don't think, then, they will ever find Cook?" Hayes asked.

"Yes, about the time they find Charley Ross—but I guess you never heard of Charley Ross; eh, sucker?"

Al grinned affectionately on the big Alaskan.

"You probably saved me from an unpleasant death," Hayes said gratefully. "But I don't understand yet how you happened to find me at all?"

Sapley looked slightly confused for a moment. "Oh, a friend of mine saw you go out—and got kind of curious," he murmured. "He knew you didn't know the town, and it sort of worried him. He called me up on the phone and told me—and I hotfooted it after you. Brought these other birds along. They're special officers from a detective bureau."

So far as it went Al's explanation was true enough. He omitted to mention that his mysterious and observing "friend" was a private detective, one of several, hired to watch Hayes at all times and to report his movements whenever Hayes's usual asso-

ciates were not with him. This quiet surveillance was one of Douglas Fox's precautions to keep the cave man from straying into embarrassing complications.

In effect, it made Hayes, all unconscious of it, as much a prisoner as if he were behind bars.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTRIGUES.

THE morning after the attack on Hayes, Douglas Fox sent for Marion. The promoter maintained a handsome office suite on Forty-Second Street, and his inner sanctum had all the massive, rich solid look that should go with wealth and power. The furniture was copied from museum pieces—high-backed chairs elaborately carved, fit for a throne-room, and an antique Italian table as big as Fox's limousine. There were rugs and one or two well chosen pictures; there were pearl buttons for Fox to push when he wanted an office boy or stenographer. The business betrayed itself by one modest sign on the door—*Douglas Fox, Inc.*

The promoter had morning papers spread all over his big Italian table. When Marion came in he was poring over them.

"Today we spring our company on a waiting world," Fox announced cheerfully. "It's absolutely the right moment. This morning's story of Hayes and his mysterious enemies is the final touch. The suckers are ripe for it."

Marion seemed about to say something, but Fox went on: "I've got a kind of hunch for things like this. Experience, I suppose. Don't know much about publicity. Couldn't write even an ad that would give away movie tickets to the kids. I'm crude. But I can feel in my bones when it's time for suckers to bite. Learned it with a medicine show, and I never forget. This stock will sell—sell like Liberty Bonds in war time—"

"I want to talk to you about this," Marion interrupted. She sat down, facing Fox. She looked at him long and searchingly. She asked finally: "You are bound to go through with this your own way?"

"What d'you mean—my own way?"

"You know what I mean. You're determined this is a stock selling chance and nothing more?"

Fox laughed loudly and good humoredly. "You too!" he exclaimed. "Marion, I thought you were too hard-boiled to fall for your own line of hokum!"

"I'm not falling for my own line of hokum! But I think I've still got common sense enough to detect signs of the truth when I run into them—"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, why don't you go into this on the level?"

"That's about enough of that!" Fox said, turning red. "Nobody can say I'm not on the level. Nobody. And that goes for you."

"Tosh!" Marion's eyes flashed. "Tell that to suckers! If you mean you're not going to break any laws, say so. I know you won't—for the darn good reason it isn't healthy. But you're not on the level with the boobs who buy stock in your company, and you're not on the level with Hayes. None of us are. If you were you'd raise enough to send a ship after his seal pelts without going into any stock selling scheme."

"What would I get out of that!"

"A share in the profits—"

"If there are any! Supposing of course the skins are there, and in good condition and can be sold. Supposing all that, I might earn enough to buy gas for my car all of next year—if I was lucky!" Fox sneered. "What's got into you, anyhow?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing—except it just struck me that Hayes— Well, we're handing Hayes a pretty raw deal—"

"Hayes been talking to you?" Fox demanded eagerly. "Did you get this idea from Hayes?"

"Well, you know you wanted to find out just what happened between Cook and Hayes. Asked me to find out—"

"Yes, yes! Well, go on—"

She hesitated. "I did find out—"

"Atta girl! Well?"

She went on with evidence of a spiteful satisfaction in her news, that made her

brown eyes snap. "Douglas, look out you don't get so hard boiled and wise that you make a sucker of yourself, sometime. This man Cook, whom you seem to regard solely as a dispensation of Providence to give your scheme publicity, isn't to be sneezed at!"

"Poof! A roughneck and some hired gangsters! He's been reading dime novels!"

"Yes?" said Marion sweetly. "Well anyhow, instead of trying anything crude on Hayes, this time he told him a little wholesome truth about you—and all of us. And it's got Hayes worrying!"

Fox's heavy-featured, handsome face lost some of its complacency. He looked a little frightened as he stared hard at the girl across the table, a smartly tailored girl, wearing a small, close fitting street hat of felt from beneath which her short cut hair of gold curled delightfully. Marion evidently enjoyed the effect of her words.

"Did Cook knock us to Hayes?"

"As nearly as I can get it, he told Hayes some bitter truth—"

"And Hayes? Is he sore? Does he believe it? Will you stop playing mystery and tell me what in hell Hayes said!"

"Hayes doesn't want to believe it," Marion answered slowly. Fox sighed heavily as if that took a load off his shoulders. "He'll stick, then? He'll go through?"

"He's loyal—because he thinks that you—and me—all of us—are his friends. Cook, in spite of the fact you think him a fat head, warned Hayes exactly of what you plan to do. And it worries him. But he told me, loyally. He said he wouldn't believe a word of it, because *we are his friends*. Douglas, that big hick is trusting you!"

Fox smote his knee noisily. "Good enough!" he exclaimed, grinning. "Well then, everything's all right. Good Lord—for a minute you had me jumping sideways! Why, it's all right, then!"

Marion studied him thoughtfully with disgusted calculation. She had thought perhaps news of Hayes's confiding trust might stir a little sympathy in Fox's heart. It hadn't stirred anything more noticeable than a feeling of relief that his scheme was not in danger. Yet Fox was not disloyal to his associates. He didn't double-cross

them! Probably, she reasoned, he could never be made to regard Hayes as a human being—one of his own kind. Hayes was something to be exploited—a different race entirely.

But Hayes's childlike faith had touched Marion more than she would admit. She alone inspired that faith. She realized it with a little fright and uneasiness. In her hands the man was wax, to be molded as she chose.

Hayes had called her a "tinsel woman" and had treated her as something worthless. Her vow was to make him pay. She would show him just how dangerous a tinsel woman could be if you got her sore! And she was showing him, here on her own ground—Broadway. Hayes was jumping the hurdles as she cracked the whip. She was making good her boast to deliver him, postage paid. But she hadn't counted on the demoralizing effect the daily evidence of the big fellow's absolute trust in her might have. When Hayes told her of the interview with Cook a thought had come, unbidden. "What a rotten lot we are! The only place he gets the truth is from Cook—who's out to cut his throat! Isn't there anybody—anybody at all—to protect the poor fish?"

Fox leaned across the table and took her hands in his. "Good girl," he applauded. "Good kid! I'm not forgetting, Marion, that I owe it to you if this goes over big! I'm not forgetting for a minute that it's you who keep Hayes in line. He's your cave man—and he eats out of your hand. You're damn smart girl, and believe you me, you won't lose by it. When it comes to the split you'll find there's a fat bonus for you!"

Marion's voice jangled as she cried vehemently, "For God's sake, Fox, don't talk about money! Don't remind me again what I'm getting out of this!"

"All right, all right," Fox protested soothingly. "Got a little katzenjammer this morning, eh? Take it easy to-day. You work too hard. All nerves!"

During her busy day a ghost stood at Marion's elbow, the phantom presentiment of Jonathan Hayes. She heard it repeat, "Of course Cook is a liar. I don't believe

these things of you—or Fox—or any of you. I'm trusting the whole thing to you—and just your word is good enough for me." And the phantom kept repeating this; the look in his eyes as he said it would not vanish.

She must be all nerves to-day, as Fox had said. In the late afternoon she was glad of the chance to get away, out into the sharp air and the crowds, determined to lose the phantom by a brisk walk.

Characteristically she chose Fifth Avenue for the promenade, and starting from her studio in a quiet old building on Sixteenth Street she swung briskly up the crowded pavement. The level rays of late sun made pure gold of the spires and towers of buildings along the wide thoroughfare. In the depth between lay a deep shadow of rich, luminous blue through which moved the long vista of great crowds and traffic; limousine and taxi tops glistened with reflected light; big, green buses in long lines, like herds of strange circus elephants lumbered along slowly, making frequent stops; traffic towers glowed white, and green, and red, as they ruled the vast, lively throng.

Slender, erect, brisk, her jolly little hat pressed tight over the short, curling gold hair, her neatly tailored bronze tweeds with fur about the throat, making of her a splendid, soldierly little figure, Marion shouldered along at a good gait. She threaded the business section of lower Fifth, the cloak and suit region of the Twenties and so into the shopping, spending, idling district of hotels and big stores and exclusive shops and art galleries. She passed the library and the town's chief cross artery, and still was walking briskly—but the shade of Hayes was ever at her shoulder.

"I'm trusting the whole thing to you," it kept saying. When she could put that out of mind Fox's praises repeated themselves, "You're a damn smart girl, and you won't lose by it."

She almost collided with a man strolling more leisurely; it was Beach, who skillfully drew her out of the throng, voicing his delight at the encounter.

Marion heard herself saying to Beach,

"And I wanted to see you. Been wanting to talk to you. How about this pastry place? Shall we have tea?"

They found a little booth in the shop. Of the several men who turned their heads to watch that smart little figure pass and envy Beach, two were Hayes and Sapley, also strolling.

"There's our Marion—with Beach again!" Al exclaimed. "Sucker, there's something doing there!"

"I saw them," Hayes acknowledged briefly.

Al looked at him studiously for a moment, wondering. "Takes it hard! Wonder if the big hick's really jealous?"

"Anything you have to say to me is just like a Christmas present," Beach smiled, when Marion and he were served.

"I—" Marion hesitated. "I haven't quite made up my mind what I'm going to say—or whether to say it. If I do, it's not the sort of thing to discuss here."

Beach looked surprised in spite of his effort not to show his curiosity.

"Surely, you wouldn't hesitate in telling me—anything?"

"No—not if I were sure—sure I ought to, I mean. I—suppose I make sure. What are you doing this evening?"

"Whatever you say, Marion."

"Will you come to my studio about eleven o'clock? I have some work earlier in the evening. Can you do that?"

"Certainly," Beach agreed. "I'll be there." He was plainly curious now.

Marion smiled gratefully. "You are a good pal! And—if I disappoint you—if it turns out I haven't anything to say, after all, promise not to feel sore about it!"

Beach promised. "This begins to sound like something deep," he smiled.

"It is," Marion said earnestly. "I feel that way about it, anyhow. But let's forget about it now—so I'll have a chance to think it out straight!"

She was regretting her impulse already. Her mind had been so filled with Hayes she had spoken without thought—and she didn't believe in doing that sort of thing—not for a minute! "It just shows how things are getting my goat!" she thought, censuring herself.

She dined at a hotel with Fox and his wife and Hayes. The Foxes danced and Hayes was left a few moments alone with her.

"I'll certainly have to teach you to toddle!" Marion declared.

Hayes answered seriously, "I suppose I'll have to learn."

"And you dread it?"

"No. Not that. I was thinking about something—about that night I came aboard the yacht and I told you I loved you—and asked for the chance to prove myself against your civilization. I didn't realize then what a big thing I was going against! It is a big thing, a terrifying thing—"

"You mean it's got you whipped?"

"No; it's got me wondering. I'm wondering if I'm quite as big as I thought I was. Marion, tell me, have I made any progress—or has this world of yours simply made a fool of me? Is there any hope for me at all?"

Marion answered him heartily: "Stuff! Nobody—nothing can make a fool of a man—unless he agrees to be made a fool of. Buck up!"

But his strange humility touched her deeply. There was doubt and mistrust in Hayes's look and attitude—mistrust of himself—and an appeal. She knew then that her stopping of Beach that afternoon had not been a mistake. She began to see what it was she wanted to talk to Beach about.

CHAPTER XIV.

AL SAPLEY APOLOGIZES.

MARION'S studio was in a sober-looking building that dated back to a day when space in New York was cheap, when even a business office was a sizable room—as large, say, as two modern apartments. There were no elevators, but a stairway of shallow steps and massive oak balustrade as broad as some streets. The halls, too, were spacious, and the rooms had high ceilings and deep windows.

It was a pleasant, businesslike sort of room, with Marion's flat-topped desk in

a corner near a window, and a steel letter-file case and hooded typewriter to speak for her industry. The rest was homelike, with a touch of her peculiar profession in places in the shape of photographs autographed by various famous persons grateful for the publicity she had won them, and presentation copies of books and odd souvenirs, many from the theater. A fire of cannel coal glowed in the open grate when Beach presented himself promptly at eleven o'clock. Marion led him to a big chair at the hearth and poured tea for him. She had changed her pert street costume for a simple house dress that fell straight from her shoulders. The neck was cut round and modestly high, and the general effect was to make her seem even younger; a little girl playing "grown up."

For some time she talked at random, and Beach listened, willing to await her business and amused by her chatter. She glanced at a clock nervously, saw it was late, and hesitated.

"Did forgetting about your problem help you to think it out straight?" Beach prompted helpfully.

"I made up my mind, anyhow. I'm going to talk business to you now. Will you consider what I say seriously—as a business proposition?"

Beach nodded. He looked particularly handsome and amiable and helpful. She thought how little effort it meant for him to do the thing she wished, and gained courage.

"I want to talk to you about this Hayes affair. In confidence, of course."

"I don't know much about this Hayes affair," Beach said quickly. "I make it my business not to. Can't you and Fox—"

"Fox can't settle what I have in mind. In fact, Fox is the last man in the world who must know of it. Do you like Hayes?"

Beach considered the abrupt question. "If you mean as an acquaintance, I think he's a decent sort. Rather admire him, in fact—"

"You believe he is honest, don't you?"

"Absolutely, ridiculously, primitively honest. Yes!"

"And if he says he knows where there are a lot of sealskins, they are there? You don't think he'd lie about that?"

"No. I think the skins are where he says. Already told Fox I thought that."

"Fox doesn't believe it," Marion said earnestly. "Fox doesn't even want to believe. He wants to exploit this scheme for the easy money in it, and that's all he cares about. And I say that's giving Hayes a pretty dirty deal."

Beach looked surprised at her vehemence—surprised and rather suspicious. If he had been critical he might have reminded the girl that she was the one who was responsible for the deal Hayes was getting. He diplomatically avoided that issue.

"It is rather rough on the cave man," he agreed. "But just what had you thought of doing about it?"

"I thought of doing this." Marion was serious and businesslike as she leaned toward him. "I'd like to see Hayes shake Fox and all Fox's schemes and go get those skins for himself—decently and honestly. They're his. He deserves the chance. What I suggest is that you give him that chance."

"I?"

"You. Why not? You have money."

"Well!" Beach cried half humorously. "Here, hold on! Maybe the reason I have money is because I don't invest in things like that!"

"My dear friend, that's all bunk, and you know it. It doesn't cost so much to outfit Hayes with a ship and let him get these sealskins. Your investment and your profit can be absolutely guaranteed. Why, just Hayes's word is good for that! Considered as a business proposition, there is nothing the matter with it—and I'm asking you to go into it. Give Hayes his chance."

Beach stopped smiling. A look of thoughtful calculation had come into his gray eyes. "Do you know what you're asking? You want me to invest a lot of money in a risky chance—a romantic adventure. And not only that—you want me to incur the undying dislike of Douglas Fox, who is an amusing chap if he is crude; also he's my friend. You want me to double-cross him and spoil his pet scheme."

"I want you to give Hayes his chance," Marion repeated. "If Fox suffers—if he is double-crossed—his conduct has invited all that's coming to him. Give Hayes a chance."

"Why?" Beach asked coldly.

"Because he deserves it."

"Again, why?"

"Because you can make money out of it."

He shrugged. "I don't need money. Any other reason?"

"Because I ask you to."

Marion looked up at him appealingly. She managed a wistful smile with the words and her fingers touched the lapel of Beach's coat coaxingly. He returned the look with evidence of due appreciation for her pretty pleading, but plainly he was not won over.

"I thought you wouldn't mind doing a little thing like that—for me," Marion murmured.

Such a look as she gave him, and such words and inflection of tone, had been effective many times. Marion saw that this time they failed to get the desired result. Beach was different metal, more unyielding metal than any she had tried. Beach was used to having his own way if he happened to want it badly enough.

The sportsman captured the fingers that were touching his coat lapel and returned the hand to Marion's knee, as if he realized that her touch was a little too persuasive for good judgement.

"I'm going to return your question of a few minutes ago," he said. "Do you like Hayes?"

She shrugged. "Would I go to all this trouble if I didn't?"

"But just how much do you like him?"

"Well, really, Beach—"

"Marion, if you ever went to a bank to borrow money on a business proposition, you understand how they question you and why. I'm questioning you for just the same purpose. You bring me a business proposition, and I'm trying to find out—just like the banker—what there is in it for me? Do you understand?"

Marion began to protest, falling back on dignity. "I know what you're getting at!

You're going to put this on personal grounds. You want to make a trade, don't you? It's going to simmer down to personal relations—Hayes and you—and me."

"Excuse me if I remind you that it was you who put this on personal grounds," Beach argued gently. "You made a very pretty plea, purely on personal grounds. Oh, I know! Other pretty ladies have asked favors of me in that way. That moist eye and trembling lip and implied promise! I have been moved to do favors before this through such dainty pantomime—and when the promises were performed, my dear, the pretty ladies scornfully disclaimed any intention or suggestion that they would do anything in return. You chose the personal grounds, Marion—I'm only trying to reduce the bargain to plain terms. If there's anything in it for me I want to know it. Brutal? Yes, but businesslike. Now, do you love Hayes?"

"Silly question! No, I do not. But I'm sorry for the poor fish—and I would like to see him get a square deal."

"Then, just how grateful would you be to me if I saw to it that he does get a square deal?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"About what it seems to mean. You know how crazy I am about you. You know how I've been trying to make you listen to me. You are very skillful in evading issues of that sort, my dear. So I'm trying to put this in words that can't be evaded. In plain English, I'm willing to help Hayes—if you are willing to marry me."

Beach delivered this ultimatum calmly enough, but he added with passion: "You know I love you! I want you worse than I ever wanted any woman. It was something I thought for a long time might wear off—or could be put aside. But it isn't that sort at all. Marion, there's just one way in the world you can make me happy, and that's by your promise to marry me."

Marion had risen and looked white and angry. Her small figure was tense. She said, a little more slowly than her wont and in a voice that was hoarse: "And you think I would trade in things like that! Beach, I didn't know you were—yellow."

Beach also rose and faced her calmly. Quick, hot resentment flashed in his gray eyes, but he answered coolly:

"I remind you again that trading was your initiative. I merely clarified your diplomacy. There seems to be nothing more to say—"

"There is nothing more to say."

"Yes—one thing." He paused on his way toward the door. "What I said about loving you—I mean. I shall always love you—always."

Marion managed a bitter smile. "Thank you—for the perfect insult."

When the door had closed behind him she was shaking with a nervous chill. She flung herself into a chair—presently she knew that somebody was crying hysterically. It was herself—Marion Reade!

Yet a month or two ago she had planned and worked deliberately to win Beach—scheming shrewdly for his proposal to marry her! Even now the sophisticated, scheming side of her couldn't understand why she felt like this.

Hayes and Al Sapley were walking. They had followed the almost nightly program of Broadway amusement; but after the theater the Alaskan refused any more of Broadway.

"Not to-night," he declared. "I'm too nervous—too restless. I'm sick of hot rooms and the smell of perfumes and food. Sick of braying orchestras. I want some quiet and fresh air, some place where you can see stars instead of electric lights."

Sapley agreed with a stifled sigh. He hated walking.

"What's a taxi for?" he wanted to know. "If you've got to have exercise we could have the boy drive us around the park."

"If you're going with me you'll walk," Hayes said grimly.

"Yours for broken arches!" Sapley grinned, making the best of it.

They crossed Forty-Second Street to Fifth Avenue, and started toward the park. For a time they wandered there, then Hayes struck back into the avenue again, heading south. He took a long, space-eating stride, not so very fast but deadily effective. Sapley had little breath to talk,

and Hayes said nothing at all. The wide, silent, almost deserted street and glimpses of the starry night sky comforted him—and he had need of comfort.

Cook's words were a slow, subtle poison that spread and gained in potency. They colored most of his thoughts, in spite of all he could do to forget them. He had said truly that Marion's world had him wondering. That uncertainty, the suspicion he could not down, gave Hayes need of all the philosophy and courage he could summon. He turned instinctively to the open air for counsel.

He was aware that Sapley was protesting. "Listen, sucker, my dogs hurt something awful! You don't want to cripple me permanently, do you? And I'm hungry. Let's find a one-arm lunch and forget this fresh air stuff for a minute. There ought to be something on Fourteenth."

Hayes agreed. But before they reached Fourteenth Street Sapley had another idea. "There's Marion's studio, and her light's burning. We'll stop there before you have to page an ambulance for me!" He led Hayes, slightly protesting, around the corner into Sixteenth Street. "Oh, Lord," he groaned, "feet! How I hate 'em—my own especially. Any time anybody gets me to do another O'Sullivan—"

Al stopped short and his fingers tightened on Hayes's arm. He drew Hayes back into the shadow and they saw Beach coming out of the studio-building entrance.

Beach walked briskly into Fifth Avenue and disappeared, unaware of the espionage.

Al Sapley whistled long and low. "So that's that!" he exclaimed, rather staggered.

"What are you talking about?" Hayes growled suspiciously.

"Beach—Marion—2 A.M. of a fine, frosty night—everything, that's all!"

"What of it?"

"If you had any eyes in your head you'd know what of it! Beach is worth a heap of jack. Every show girl on Broadway knows that, and most of 'em have tried to knock that roll of his. Some have succeeded. Marion Reade's been scheming and working all summer to land Beach, and now it looks as if she'd got somewheres."

"Are you suggesting," Hayes asked

steadily, "that Marion is going to marry Beach?"

"Marry him!" Al glanced sharply at the Alaskan. He caught his arm. "Sucker, get wise!" he exclaimed. "I'm telling you for your own good. Beach is a hard-boiled bird—and he's not the marrying kind. Marion knows that as well as anybody, and the girl's no fool. She can watch her own step, thank you! If this is what I think it is, she'll get something pretty out of it—"

Al Sapley's words ended in a screech that strangled in his throat. Hayes had caught him round the neck and hurled him savagely against the house wall behind them. Sapley went to his knees and the big Alaskan picked him up by the collar as if he were a sack stuffed with paper.

"You—dirty—hound!" Hayes's expression was murderous.

Sapley was clawing the air. "For God's sake—oh, for God's sake!" he protested. "What'd I do? What—"

"You insulted the name of a decent woman. Now you will—"

"I never meant to. I—listen, sucker, how did I know she was—that you felt that way—about her? I never guessed. I'm sorry, I tell you. I apologize—"

"Yes, you will apologize," Hayes declared, shaking him. "You'll apologize—to her!"

"I tell you I'm sorry. Lay off me—"

"You can tell that to Marion."

Al gasped and squeaked with new terror. "What d'you mean?"

"I mean you are going up there with me and make your apology where it is due—"

"Have a heart! I apologize, don't I? I'm asking your pardon. What's the use bothering Marion—"

"You insulted Marion—a decent girl. You said the foulest thing a man can say about a woman. And you're going to answer—before her." Hayes's face was hard as granite. He began to drag the helpless Sapley across the street toward the studio.

Sapley fought wildly. "Listen to reason," he pleaded. "Can't you listen to a little reason! You don't want this to go any farther. Hayes—think what you're doing—Hayes!"

But Hayes marched on, and Sapley went with him, protesting in vain, struggling vainly against a giant's strength.

Hayes found Marion's bell and rang it; the street door latch clicked. He pushed in and dragged his victim upstairs and along corridors until he found the studio door. Sapley had ceased to argue now. He was dumb and he went without a struggle, but there was a look growing in his eyes that was not only shame and humiliation, but something harder.

Marion opened her door to Hayes's knock and stared aghast at the spectacle the two men made.

Hayes pushed in and announced grimly: "This man has something to say to you. Now, Sapley, tell her what you said and apologize."

In a sort of savage desperation Sapley protested once more. "No, damn you! You can kill me, but you can't make me do that. You—"

The big hand twisted his collar and choked off his words. Hayes held him thus for a moment, then released him suddenly. "Talk," he ordered.

Sapley's face, purpling with congested blood, faded to a sickly white. His eyes fixed their gaze on a crack in the floor as he repeated like some new and strange automaton, "I said exactly what everybody's been saying since last summer, that you made a play for Beach and you went into it with your eyes open. I said you were wise to Beach and his other affairs, and if you were after that bird it was because of the jack that's in it and—and not because you expected to marry him—"

"And now!" Hayes prompted.

"Now, I got to say I'm sorry I said it. And I apologize to you." Sapley added with a rush of anger, "That's every damn word I'm going to say. Before I'm done I'll make you damn sick of this night, you big hick!"

Hayes took him by the shoulder, opened the door and put him into the hall. "Get out," he said.

He closed the door again and stood facing the utterly astounded woman. Hayes's mouth was grim and his eyes were hard. He had some difficulty controlling his

breathing as he faced Marion. It was a little unsteadily that he announced, "I have something to say to you now. You will please listen."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BITTER TRUTH.

OUT of the bewilderment and confusion of Hayes's tempestuous entrance at such an hour and Sapley's revelation and apology, Marion Reade realized one thing very clearly as she faced the big Alaskan: that he was about to say something she must not let him say.

It was not the time to let Hayes talk. The man was overwrought with horror and anger at Sapley—perhaps at Beach, too. He would say things they each would regret. She knew it—and if Hayes began that way Marion couldn't answer for her own self-control.

She took Hayes by the arm. "No talk to-night—please. To-morrow I'll listen to anything you have to say—"

"You will listen to-night."

"Hayes, be reasonable! Not here, at this hour—"

"You will listen to me!"

"I ask you as a favor, don't—don't say anything—not to-night! Hayes, I beg of you—"

"You will listen to me to-night."

His stubborn reiteration was maddening. She flared out, "*Will* listen? *Will*, you say? Who are you to order what I shall do? This is my home. I'm living my own life. I'll order my own affairs. Do you think you can break in here like a hoodlum at two o'clock in the morning and get away with it? Now, you—you can get out!"

She reached past him and flung open the door. "Follow your friend, Al Sapley," she said bitterly.

Hayes caught her arm with a heavy hand and released it from the knob. He put her aside gently and closed the door. "Sit down. It's time you learned a few things that any woman of sense would have known years ago. Do you know what kind of fool you've been making of yourself? Do you realize now?"

Astonishment and indignation choked her. She gasped. "Do you know what you're saying—and who you're saying it to?"

"Yes. I'm saying it to you. You've made a fool of yourself. You've played that woman's game of yours once too often—and you picked the wrong man in Beach. You—who thought you were so clever—do you know what you've done? You've made your name and reputation the latest Broadway joke. You've heard what Sapley said. He's right. That's what they all say. I'm here to warn you to be careful—"

"You! Warn me? What right have you? And where, pray, did you get the mad idea that anything you said would have any effect?"

Marion was wonderful in her indignation. Her scorn of him—the anger that carried away her more sober judgment, made her like a flame—bright, beautiful and dangerous.

"Answer me"—she was majestic—"who gave you any right? Where do you get the idea you can come here and say things like that to me?"

Hayes said sternly, "I say that because I love you."

"You love me!"

"I do love you."

She laughed and the effect of that musical, chiming laugh was startling. Rage had made a wonderful actress of the girl. She laughed at his love with such light-heartedness that it disconcerted him.

"I do love you," he repeated. "Laugh all you please; you can't change it. And because I love you I'm warning you that you're throwing away everything worth while. Because of Beach you are endangering your good name. You have let him make a fool of you—"

"A fool! So, I'm a fool, am I? I? Good God, and I let you stand there and tell me that!"

This was too much. The man she had pitied and tried to protect and help, saying a thing like that. The man she had been bargaining with Beach, telling her these things! Jonathan Hayes of Kalvik Island, of all people in the world, calling her a fool!

She was too angry now to care for any consequences. There seemed but one thing

in the world worth doing, that was to prick the bubble of this colossal conceit—to hurt this man—this hick—this supreme dumb-bell who had dared what no other man ever dared—to call her a fool.

She pointed a scornful finger at him and began to speak, slowly at first, every word clear cut and thrilling with her contemptuous laughter.

"Speaking of fools, I want you to listen to me. I'm going to try to get a little truth into that thick Alaskan skull of yours, Jonathan Hayes. Every word of it is true and without exaggeration. Heaven knows it needs no exaggeration!"

"Do you want to know who is the fool, who is the joke of Broadway, the hottest laugh that was ever handed this town? You are, my hick friend!"

"Do you want to know who was captured in his native lair and dragged out to civilization like a dancing bear on a chain for the amusement of a cheap sucker crowd and the profit of Douglas Fox? You were!"

"Do you want to know whom Fox and Ada and Beach and Sapley—and everybody who knows about it or can make a good guess—considers the funniest sketch and the biggest simoleon civilization has discovered? That's you."

"A fool—that's you. Easy pickings—that's you! The man who didn't know any better than to let Douglas Fox, the promoter of more swindles than any man on Broadway, use him for sucker bait. You again!"

"And who brought you here? Who led you around on a leash? Who made a tame cave man out of you, warranted not to scratch, bite, or even think for himself? I did! And you call me a fool!"

She laughed again, and the music of her tinkling laugh was perfect.

"You call me a fool!" she repeated. "You! You! Oh, that is rich!"

She stopped laughing with a sudden catch of the breath when she saw Hayes's face. He had gone red, then white. Now there was something queer and quiet about him that frightened Marion. There had been something of that look the night on Kalvik when she shirked sentry duty against Cook's men; again when he kissed her and

damned her in the same breath, and again when he said he loved her—something of this look each of these times, but never so marked as now.

The hysterical anger that had goaded her into saying things she had no intention of saying just for the inhuman joy of hurting this man who had the power to hurt her, evaporated. She looked at Hayes and she was afraid.

Hayes said quietly, almost musingly, "Cook was right! I was afraid of that. And you are right—quite right. I am the bigger fool of the two of us." He turned to the door.

Marion whispered shakily, "Where are you going?"

"I don't know—why, yes! To the hotel—to bed."

"But—but—no! You're going to do something! Hayes, I can see it in your eye! You're going to do something—"

She caught his sleeve. "Be careful," she whispered. "Oh, be careful. Don't—don't do anything!"

He looked at her a little vaguely. "All right," he agreed. "Not to-right. When I do, I'll let you know."

"You promise me that? You promise!"

"I promise."

He opened the door and went away.

She was left facing that screen of hard-wood paneling that eliminated him from the room. Her hand clawed at her mouth with a terrible gesture of futility. She was whispering to herself, "I've done it—I have done it this time! Dear God, what a ghastly mess!"

CHAPTER XVI.

KALVIK ISLAND JUSTICE.

MARION got to Fox's office early next morning before Fox. She had not slept at all. She wanted to warn Fox, had made up her mind that she must warn Fox—and yet she had no liking for that interview.

It would not be pleasant to tell Fox that she had wrecked his pet scheme, but the blame was hers and she could not deny it. Fox must be told. There was no getting

away from that. He must be warned before Hayes did anything—anything wild and desperate.

She had tried several times, and vainly, to reach Hayes by the telephone. Either he had never gone to his hotel or would answer no calls. She was almost afraid to go back to that office.

But the office was cheerful and commonplace when she came in. The stenographers were at work and an office boy nodded a smiling good morning. "Couple reporters waiting in the reception room, Miss Reade."

Marion wondered if by any chance she had dreamed the events of the last few hours. Already they were far away and vague in outline. But she knew there was no such good luck as that.

She stopped in the reception room to speak to the newspaper men. There were three of them from evening papers, and another came in as she was talking. They gathered around her.

"What's doing with the Eskimo millionaire to-day?" they wanted to know.

Marion shrugged her shoulders and smiled. "Not a thing that I know of, boys. But I'm obliged to you for asking."

"Well, there's something! All the city desks in town got a tip there'd be a story here. When's it going to happen?"

"Honestly, I don't know," Marion said truthfully. "Probably Mr. Fox has some statement to issue. He'll be in shortly." She excused herself and went to Fox's office to wait his coming.

The promoter arrived soon after her. Fox was smiling and breezy. "This morning's ads look immense!" he exclaimed. "The girl says the first mail brought a couple inquiries for stock. Didn't I tell you suckers were ripe to bite?"

Fox eyed her curiously. "You're working too hard," he decided gruffly. "Don't kill yourself on this job. The hard work's all over, anyhow. Nothing to do now but count the gate receipts. Why don't you take the week end and go down to Atlantic City? And, oh, yes, what are all these reporters waiting for?"

Marion exclaimed, "I thought you sent for them? I didn't."

"No, I didn't. What's the big idea, I wonder—"

"They said every paper in town had a tip to get a man up here for a good story."

"Well," Fox exclaimed, "somebody has pulled a boner! No story here—unless they want to print something about how the stock is selling—"

"Don't try to hand them that bunk!"

"I won't. I'll pas the cigars and say it was a mistake—"

"Then I must talk to you—about something serious," Marion exclaimed.

"Be right with you as soon as I give these reporters the gate—" Fox paused in the doorway and exclaimed, "Oh, hello Hayes! Looking for me?"

Marion was conscious of a sudden giddiness. There was something cold in her breast where her heart had been. She held to the back of a chair to keep her balance.

"I am looking for you," Hayes answered. She noticed that he spoke with slow and careful deliberation, as a man would speak whose tongue was slightly fuddled by liquor. "Is Marion here?"

"Sure. Inside—"

"That's good, very good," Hayes went on with that queer, precise way. Fox backed into the room and the Alaskan followed him. Not alone was his voice peculiar, but his manner. At another time she would have laughed, for Hayes was exactly like a man humorously bewildered by alcohol. He bore himself with the same stiffness, the same restraint, the same fumbling attempt to keep himself under control.

This morning, if there was any humor in Hayes's appearance it was grim. To Marion he seemed more terrible than a man in a towering rage, for she guessed that he was fighting with all his strength to keep a towering rage subdued—to control himself.

Fox noticed Hayes's peculiarity and evidently set it down to the obvious explanation of alcohol. He flashed an amused side glance at Marion, expressive of surprise and raillery. It seemed to say, "Well! Look who's here. A cave man with a souse!"

To Hayes Fox spoke jovially. "Sit down, Old Timer! Take a load off your feet. You're in the hands of your friends."

Marion's hand went to her lips in terror at these last ill-chosen words. She wanted to scream a warning to Fox, to tell him he was playing with dynamite, but she was too frightened to do it.

Hayes sat down, fumblingly as he did everything this morning. "You—sit down," he said to Fox gravely.

Fox laughed again, to cover his own surmises. "Have a cigar—or a little drink? Anything you want in the safe—"

"No. I want to talk to you, Fox. I want to talk about business—"

Marion rose hastily. "Then I'll be going—"

"Wait!" Hayes said it quietly, but the word stopped her like a shot. "You stay. Here. Now Fox—" He hesitated and shivered. He passed his hand before his eyes, bewildered by this intoxication of anger.

Marion was aware that Fox was slyly kicking her foot under the table and winking broadly. Fox was enjoying what he conceived to be a very funny joke. She could stand it no longer.

"Fox!" she exclaimed.

Hayes raised his hand. "Wait," he said thickly. "I will try to explain things in my own way. Let me talk."

"Sure you won't have another drink?" Fox expressed. "All right. Talk away, Old Timer."

"Yes," Hayes said, "I will talk. I—" He leaned across the table, his face close to Fox's, looking at Fox eye to eye. "You played me—for a—sucker, didn't you, Fox?"

"Who, me? Why Hayes, what's eating you!"

"You made a fool of me—a sort of dancing bear to advertise your swindle. That's it, isn't it?"

Fox struck a dramatic posture, expressive of horror. "Hayes! My God, what is eating you to-day? Why, Hayes—"

Hayes pressed on: "It was a swindle, wasn't it? You didn't care about the seal-skins. You didn't care a damn about anything but the stock you could sell. You were using me just to bait your trap, and the thing you care about least of all is what happens to me—what happens to my

good name. When you finished using me you meant to kick me aside—like an old shoe—isn't that right?"

Fox had gone very red. He blustered loudly, smacking the table with his fist and raising his voice to a roar. "Stop! Stop right where you are! You can't talk to me—"

"Fox! Fox, *if you value your life* don't shout at me. Don't do it."

Fox must have seen then that there was murder seething in Hayes's heart. He shrank back in his chair, his bluish eyes round and glassy. A twitching seized his full lower lip. He forgot what he meant to say and abandoned all idea of saying it.

"I want you to tell the truth this morning, Fox; nothing else. Is it true, as I have said, that you were using me to advertise your stock swindle?"

"It isn't a swindle. You can't prove that—"

"Fox! Answer the question."

"Yes. I used you—"

"You do not believe in these sealskins? You never expected to get them—or looked for dividends from them? Is that true?"

"I—you can't prove a word of it—"

"Answer the question."

"I—yes, damn you!"

"And the whole thing is a swindle, a swindle on me and on the public?"

"Who says—"

"Answer!"

"Say, listen here—"

Marion clutched at Fox's arm. "In Heaven's name answer him," she warned.

"Tell the truth if you value your life!"

Fox bowed his head.

"In words," Hayes prompted. "Say it!"

"It was—a—swindle."

Hayes looked at Marion. "You are witness to all this," he reminded her, and rising, went to the door that communicated with the reception room where the wondering newspaper men waited. "Please come in this room, gentlemen," he invited.

The reporters came and formed an awkward little group. It did not need the trained instinct of a reporter to guess that something had been happening among these three. Fox was pasty white, collapsed in

his chair, staring fixedly at the opposite wall and breathing hard. Marion huddled in a chair near by, her hand at her lips. Hayes towered above them all, and his obvious effort to control himself made them shrink from him.

Hayes went to the several communicating doors, turned their locks and dropped the keys in his pocket. The newspaper men murmured uneasily.

"Let me tell you something," Hayes said sternly. "Before we go any further, let me warn you all. Don't interfere! Anybody who tries to stop me in what I am going to do is going to get hurt."

Fox sprang to his feet in a panic, but Hayes's pointing finger dropped him as if it had been a bullet.

"Stay right where you are!" Hayes commanded. He turned to the newspaper men.

"I asked you gentlemen to come here this morning. Since I have been in your city you have printed a good deal about me—and about Kalvik Island. I'm going to ask you to print one thing more in your newspapers. I want you to tell your readers about Kalvik Island justice."

Fox's hand was stealing across the table, reaching for the telephone.

Marion stopped him with an exclamation. "Don't! Don't do that! Don't touch that button, either! Don't do anything, if you put any value on your life."

"No," Hayes repeated, "don't do it, Fox." He turned again to the newspaper men.

"You know this man, Douglas Fox? He is a promoter. Last summer he came to the island where I have lived, and when he heard that I knew the location of some valuable pelts he made a contract with me, by which he was to form a company to find and sell the skins. I agreed to come with him to this city. I was ignorant, absolutely ignorant, innocent of your civilization and all its ways. What this man—and his associates—told me to do, I did. I was like a child in their hands, and like a child, I trusted everything to them. Everything. I dressed when they told me to dress, and in the clothes they told me to wear. I ate when they told me. I slept when they told

me to sleep. The things I have done and the things I have said are the things this man has told me to do and say, the things he advised me were right and proper to help him in his plan of helping me—things he told me were honorable, honest things. Morning, noon and night, waking and sleeping, I have been a child in this man's hands, clay that he could mold to suit himself.

"This morning, just now, Douglas Fox has admitted before this witness, that his scheme is a deliberate swindle. That his whole intention was to sell stock, using all this publicity he got through me to attract his gulls. He confesses he is a swindler

and a cheat, and he has degraded me to help out his crooked purpose." Hayes swung on Fox suddenly. "Is this true? Answer!"

Fox rolled his eyes at them all and his lips twitched, but seemed incapable of speech.

Marion spoke, and so unexpectedly they all started. "It is true. I heard Fox admit it."

"You know it is true—of your own knowledge," Hayes said bitterly.

"Yes. I know it is true—of my own knowledge."

Hayes strode over to Fox's chair. "Fox, stand up!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



The Contract with Conceptione

by Howard Rockey

WITH his back to the wall of the patio of Ramon Gonzalez's *hacienda*, Miguel sat idly puffing a *cigarillo* in the moonlight. Resplendent in his silver-spurred boots and his bullion-threaded blouse and breeches, Miguel had ridden down the mountain path to bask in the silver rays of the evening orb—and the darker, softer glow of Conceptione Gonzalez's eyes.

Across his knees lay a guitar, and now, as he speculatively viewed the dainty, high-heeled slippers of Conceptione, his fingers idly strummed the strings. Conceptione, lolling back in a wicker armchair, seemed to share his mood and also to feel the spell of the tropical night, for her pointed toes

began to beat time to the tune on the flagging of the courtyard. From the white-walled city of Colonia, nestling at the foot of the mountain and washed by the dark waters of the bay, there drifted up to them faintly the strains of a military band playing on the *presidio*. And now a bell tolled in the tower of the cathedral, its cross-mounted spire seeming like a toy from the height of the Gonzalez *estancia*.

"Father is late," said Conceptione, with a glance toward the winding coquina road that threaded its way up through the forest from the water front.

Miguel shrugged. "*Mañana* will be time enough," he answered with characteristic languor. "To-night let us sing and dance."

His fingers musingly plucked from his instrument an intriguing air, and he hummed the words of an old Castilian serenade.

Slowly Conceptione arose and walked to the embrasure in the wall from which she could overlook the city. Over the tree tops, far below her, she saw the lights of the hotels, the dance halls, and the clubs. She pictured the throngs on the plaza—the dark-eyed, jeweled *señoritas* and the immaculate officers, strolling and tangoing, while groups of stolid *peons* from the interior looked on in wonderment. Then she glanced toward the harbor, with its tiny ships faintly outlined in the moonlight—their colored lamps bobbing up and down upon the gentle sway of the waters.

"The Pearl of the Tropics is in," she remarked. "It is strange that father does not come."

But Miguel only shrugged again, and with smiling calculation began to play a fandango he knew Conceptione could not resist. She turned toward him smilingly, her shapely arms poised upon her slender waist. Her lithe, sinuous body began to move in cadence with Miguel's music, and a moment later her fingers were snapping like castanets as her heels *click-clicked* rhythmically upon the paving of the *patio*. Faster and faster Miguel played the air, and more and more rapidly Conceptione's graceful movements blended with the abandon of the dance. Her eyes flashed fire as they looked through the silvery night at the musician, and her red lips parted in a smile. To Conceptione dancing was the poetry of life—almost life itself.

So enthralled were the two that they did not hear the slow approaching hoofbeats of horses, tired from the long climb, nor did the dance or the music cease when two mounted figures paused before the gateway and stared into the *patio*.

Then, exhausted but elated, Conceptione curtsied deeply and dropped, with a charming little gesture, at the feet of the smiling Miguel. And as she did so there came an angry exclamation from the gateway.

"Pedro! Thou spawn of a sand crab, where are thy manners? Pedro, *we wait!*"

Instantly Conceptione was on her feet,

and Miguel, with a bored air, cast away his cigarette. A sleepy stable boy hurried from his quarters to take the horses of Don Ramon and his guest, and the two men came through the archway as Conceptione hastened to greet her father.

"I was beginning to worry," Conceptione murmured as she threw herself into the arms of the white-haired, distinguished-looking old Colonian.

"So it seems—from the way you dance," snapped Don Ramon impatiently.

Conceptione's eyes smiled mischievously, and she glanced coquettishly over her shoulder at Miguel, who, reading the frown on Don Ramon's face, hastened to get to his feet.

"Good evening, *señor*," he said with a bow.

"*Buenos noches!*" exclaimed Don Ramon.

Without more adieu, and with scarce a look in Conceptione's direction, Miguel slunk through the gateway, not forgetting to swagger and clatter his silver spurs impressively as he passed into the road.

"Conceptione," said Don Ramon, "this is my friend Señor Abraham Raphael, from New York. The *señor* is a great impresario—the director of a magnificent operatic performance known as the Fall Frivolities. I have asked him to be my guest for the night—to avoid the heat and the crowds of the city."

Conceptione curtsied low, not forgetting to look up at the *señor* with proper respect and wonderment from beneath the long lashes that swept her olive-ivory cheeks.

"I shall order supper and cooling drinks at once," she said dutifully, and disappeared into the *hacienda*.

The Señor Raphael, somewhat weary and sore from his unaccustomed saddle journey up the winding road, sank into a chair and mopped his brow.

"There ain't no romance in you at all, Don Ramon," he protested. "A long while since I seen it—dancing like that. And right away you stop it by yelling for a horse's nurseboy, and because you want to eat! Now, with me, there ain't nothing but art."

"To me dancing is nonsense," replied

Don Ramon. "And it is all the fault of that worthless scum of the Sancho upstarts, Miguel—and his guitar. No sooner do I descend to the city than the lazy good-for-nothing slips through my gate and fills my daughter's head with silly nonsense. With him life is but a song—and a dance—and the whispering of foolish words. Were Conceptione's mother alive it would be different—but even here in Colonia, *señor*, the younger generation is getting out of hand."

"You ought to see 'em in New York—short skirts, cigarettes, cocktails—"

Don Ramon listed his shaggy white eyebrows. "I thought in New York there were no cocktails."

"Well, think again," laughed Raphael. "But, say, that daughter of yours—and her dance—would be a riot in my show!"

Don Ramon drew himself up haughtily. "My daughter on a public stage! *Car-ramba!* You insult me, sir!"

"Now, don't get huffy," interrupted Raphael. "Even English ladies and Russian princesses go into the movies these days. There's a pot of money in it."

"The cinema, perhaps, is different," Don Ramon admitted. "But my Conceptione herself—dancing in a music hall—with hundreds of gay *caballeros* staring upon her beauty! *Santa Maria*—never!"

"Well, you got a nice little bungalow up here, anyway," observed Raphael, changing the subject.

Don Ramon gazed about with a pathetic look in his eyes.

"Once," he said sadly, "my *estancia* was rich with the products of the soil and much gold came to me each season. But now we are poor—"

"I told you there's a pot of money in dancing," Raphael reminded him. "Now, I would make a contract—"

"*Señor!*" broke in Don Ramon sharply. "Must I tell you again that the profession of a dancer is not an occupation for a daughter of the house of Gonzalez!"

"Well, of course," admitted Raphael, with a deprecatory wave of the hand, "if you'd rather starve—"

"Forgive me, *mi amigo!*" apologized Don Ramon. "I shall see to the meal at once—personally."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking that we wouldn't get something to eat after a while," Raphael grinned. "I was speaking in figures, as they say. Now, some of my headlines draw down as much as a thousand a week—"

"A thousand dollars—American?" inquired Don Ramon unbelievably.

"Sure," confirmed Raphael, "every week—all season. My show's always a sure-fire hit."

But the appearance of Conceptione in the doorway interrupted the conversation. Behind her came an old native woman, bearing a covered tray, which she arranged on a table and then placed two chairs for the men.

"Be seated, *señor*," invited Don Ramon, as Conceptione herself poured the wine, and Raphael hastily parked himself before the viands.

But his hunger was set aside as he realized the beauty of the girl, noted her charm and grace, and thought, with eager avarice, of the sensation she would make as a feature of his Fall Frivolities. Then he attacked his food and drank eagerly of the wine.

"I wish this place wasn't so far from little old Manhattan," he sighed. "I'd like to spend week ends here."

Don Ramon smiled. "I hope you will often be my guest," he responded courteously.

"What do you call that dance?" Raphael asked of Conceptione.

"I do not know, *señor*," she answered, with drooping eyes. "It is an old, old air from Spain. The steps I invented myself."

"You invented the steps!" cried Raphael incredulously. "Why, my director, Sam Stein, himself couldn't make up steps like those! Say, look here, Don," he continued, addressing his host, "you go to change your mind about this thing. Your daughter's just what I came down here to find, only I didn't know there was such a knockout anywhere in the world. She'd make New York sit up and holler for more, and she'd be worth to me, anyhow, by the week—"

"Please, I beg of you, *señor!*" protested Don Ramon, with a meaning glance in the

direction of Conceptione. "Please do not speak of the matter further—now."

"Oh, I get you," chuckled Raphael, and proceeded with his meal.

"Conceptione," said her father, "I think you had better retire. Please see that a guest room is made ready for the *señor*."

Conceptione bowed—to her father and to Raphael—and shyly withdrew, bidding them good night.

"Honest, Don," Raphael went on, unable to contain himself longer, "you must change your mind. You say business ain't what it was—"

"Unfortunately, no," lamented Don Ramon. "The war ruined my exportations. But then came a ray of hope in the shipment of rum to ports where its entry is forbidden."

Raphael chuckled. "So that's the game, is it?"

"It was," laughed Don Ramon. "But it proved so profitable that the *jefe* of Colonia issued a ban against the shipment of rum from the city and took over the trade himself."

"So this *jefe* feller's a sort of a tropical Tammany tiger, eh?" said Raphael, with a knowing smile. "But since that's the case, what do you say to letting me take your daughter back with me at a salary of a thousand a week—gold—for a five months' season—with the privilege of renewal?"

In his excitement he reached into the pocket of his linen coat for a fountain pen and was about to make some rapid calculations on the table cover.

"You tempt me—almost," admitted Don Ramon, "but even if I were to swallow my pride, I doubt if Conceptione would go."

"Y' mean she's in love with this guitar feller?" demanded Raphael in annoyance.

"That pig!" exclaimed Don Ramon, with flashing eyes. "If he stood in the way of my plans I would spit him like the swine he is."

"Good stuff!" agreed Raphael. "And you won't have no trouble with the young lady. She'd go daffy about it. Fine dresses—rooms in a first-class hotel—her own limousine to and from the theater—her name in big lights outside—and the audience going mad about her—"

"Sh!" cautioned Don Ramon. "The picture you paint is alluring. It might turn the child's head. And I must give the matter much thought."

"Well, you think quick," advised Raphael. "This here Pearl of the Tropics sails to-morrow afternoon, and I ain't going to hang about after she's gone. And," he added impressively, "I won't be back."

Don Ramon sipped his wine in silence, his old eyes hidden beneath his shaggy brows, gazing musingly into his empty plate.

"It might be a wise thing to do," he said slowly. "It might be well for the child. She is marooned here—alone—and with no future before her save a marriage with some second-rate youth of the city. Once a Gonzalez would have been the most sought-after of eligible *débutantes*—but to-day, without dowry—" He shrugged hopelessly, the trace of a tear in his eyes.

Raphael's pride was in the present—in his own achievements—but he was shrewd enough to realize the old planter's pride in his ancestry and his chagrin at the decay of the family fortune and his personal standing in the community. And Raphael meant to trade upon the other's mood.

"You accept my offer, and there won't be a man in Colonia, or in New York, for that matter, who won't be crazy to marry the girl. With her face, her figure, her talent—and the way I'll feature her—there isn't any reason why she can't go to Europe in a couple of seasons and make even a bigger hit there."

"Let me ponder over it until to-morrow," suggested Don Ramon, wavering.

"There ain't time!" announced Raphael. "Now, you get some paper, and I'll draw up a contract right now. How old is she?"

"Sixteen."

"Sixteen! She looks four years older."

"You forget that our girls mature early," Don Ramon reminded him.

"But she can't sign a contract," protested Raphael. "It wouldn't be legal in the States."

"I suppose I could sign?" suggested Don Ramon.

"Yes," the manager assented. "Of course you can. Now let's talk it over."

For an hour the two spoke in low tones in the pleasant cool of the *patio*, while Conceptione, in a filmy negligee, sat at the window of her boudoir, looking down upon the lights of Colonia and dreaming dreams not half so glorious as those being discussed by the two men in the moonlight. Yet now and then a phrase of Raphael's reached her ears and piqued her curiosity.

Shrewd and experienced though he was, Raphael met his match in bargaining when he tried to secure Don Ramon's signature to his contract.

"It is my duty to the child to see that the terms are as favorable as possible," her father said. "It gives me a heart pang to consent to this thing, but perhaps, as you say, a career will be a great and glorious thing for her. Yet, the clothes—the transportation—the living expenses in New York—all are high. And," he added with a sigh, "I have told you that we are poor. She must also have a companion. I cannot go myself, and it would not do that a girl of Conceptione's family and bringing up should be alone in another country. My servant, Contina, must accompany her."

Raphael agreed. It hurt him to part with an unnecessary nickel, but he could see where each dollar he spent to secure Conceptione's services would net him many more. So he assumed the rôle of Prince Bountiful with as easy a grace as he could muster, and proved generous beyond his instinctive traits in drawing up the bargain.

It was at last agreed. Raphael would pay two thousand dollars down to bind the contract. Conceptione and her duenna should sail upon the Pearl of the Tropics when it left the wharf at Colonia late the following afternoon. And immediately upon the opening of the Fall Frivolities she was to draw one thousand dollars a week for a minimum of twenty weeks. Raphael agreed to pay the passage to New York City.

Don Ramon sighed. "It is satisfactory," he said in a beaten tone. "Perhaps I do wrong. Her mother might never have consented—but I have agreed, and it shall

so stand. Yet I dread the task of informing her."

"Why not let me do it?" asked Raphael.

Don Ramon smiled. "You do not know Conceptione. It requires a father to bend such a girl to his will—to make her accept his decisions as a matter of course—because they are best for her."

"Suit yourself," said Raphael. "I'll write you a check now."

Don Ramon shook his head. "I am sorry—but the check will not do. It is not that I doubt you, my friend. You have been most kind. But a check on New York means a loss in the exchange here. It would also advise our noble *jefe* of Colonia that I have received a large payment. He might desire his share—and he is the governor of the city. I could not refuse to make him a handsome present. To-morrow, early, you will journey to the city and bring back with you the money in gold."

"But that will cost *me* exchange—even if I can get that much gold!" Raphael protested.

"I am desolate," Don Ramon told him, "but what can I do? It is as I have said. American gold is worth much more than the local currency I could obtain for your check—and—I know you will forgive me—I have only had the honor to know you since the steamer docked at noon and we were so opportunely presented at the club."

Raphael was inclined to be impatient, but he held himself in check. At worst, he had struck a good bargain. Once in the hands of his director, this girl of the Colombian mountainside would prove a veritable mint on Broadway.

"Have it your way," he conceded. "But if I'm to go down to the city and back up that crazy mountain path again before the steamer sails—Let's go to bed!"

Don Ramon was no longer the bargainer, seeking every advantage to salve his broken pride and prejudice and to protect his daughter's best interests. He was the thoughtful host. He clapped his hands, and the old woman appeared to clear away the dinner dishes. At her heels came a swarthy native, ready to escort the two to

their chambers and to minister to their desires before retiring.

The bolt shot through the great gate giving upon the *patio*. The steps of the servant died away in the silence of the night, and all was still about the *hacienda*. The Señor Abraham Raphael, weary yet happy, snored upon his couch, fanned by the cooling breeze from the sea and loudly breathing the refreshing, perfumed freshness of the mountainside.

Don Ramon Gonzalez slept somewhat restlessly in his own apartment. And Conceptione sat, sighing, beside the window that overlooked the almost darkened and somnambulant city of Colonia far below. She swung back the lattice and dropped a pebble from the window sill. It struck outside the *hacienda* wall and clicked upon a bit of rock.

There came a night noise, as though a sleeping parrot had been disturbed from its perch amid the trees and was protesting against this nocturnal invasion of its rest, and Conceptione smiled.

Then, monkeylike, a darkly silhouetted figure began to climb the coquina wall, grasping at the vines that grew about it. A moment later Miguel of the guitar was face to face with Conceptione. For a moment he stared at her in mute adoration—and she looked back lovingly into his eyes. There was a flame of fiery tenderness in that glance—then a low musical laugh of mutual understanding. A kiss—a hasty whisper—a warning wave of Conceptione's shapely, slender finger—and Miguel let himself agilely down again. Conceptione's lattice closed again.

Morning dawned, and the mists from the seashore lifted, revealing the still sleeping white-walled city of Colonia and the early glory of the tiny bay tinted by the blood of the rising sun. The *hacienda* of Don Ramon Gonzalez was not yet astir, but the Señor Abraham Raphael was already in the *patio* gazing through the embrasure upon the panorama of beauty spread out before him.

"What a scene set!" he exclaimed. "I'd give another thousand if Sol Baum was here to sketch it and make color notes. For a musical show it would be immense!"

Then he turned with a start as he heard the shuffling of the straw sandals of Pedro, the stable boy, coming across the flagging. Picturesquely clad, and still more picturesque in his villainous appearance, Pedro piqued Señor Raphael's interest.

"A type!" he muttered. "Sure enough, a type! I'd like to take *him* back with me."

But Pedro only bowed ceremoniously. "The *señor* goes to the city?" he inquired with polite, if not perfect, English.

"Don't I get breakfast first?" asked Raphael peevishly.

"It is being prepared for the *señor*," Pedro answered. "Shall I saddle one horse or two?"

"I won't need but one," Raphael told him; "but how the devil do you expect me to find the way alone?"

"I saddle two, then," said Pedro. "The master wished to know if Pedro should guide and guard the *señor*."

Raphael hesitated as he scrutinized the stable boy. He looked like a cross between a pirate and a retired murderer—and Raphael was not sure that he *was* retired or that buccaneers were extinct in mid-South America ports. However, cheered by the savory odor of the breakfast the woman servant was laying out, Raphael decided to take a chance. So, as the sun rose higher in the heavens, the New York theatrical manager, uncomfortably astride his mount, wended his way down the mountainside with Pedro in the lead.

It was afternoon when he returned—hot, dusty and red of face. He was tired and in none too good a temper, but as his eyes fell upon Conceptione standing beside her father in the *patio*, he felt amply repaid for his trouble and congratulated himself upon his good fortune. From the saddle-bags he produced the gold and poured it upon the table before the amazed eyes of Conceptione and the seasoned smile of Don Ramon.

"Now sign!" exploded Raphael, eager to be done with the business and prepare for his final trip down to the steamship landing.

Then he received a jolt. It came in the form of a shrug of helpless rage on the part of Don Ramon, and a saucy, independent flash of Conceptione's dark eyes.

"Am I a cow, that I am to be sold for

gold?" she demanded, advancing upon him like some furious young tigress. "I *will* not go with you on the big steamship! I will not go to this New York and dance for you! I love Colonia—I love the mountains—and my pet monkey. I remain here."

Raphael gasped. "Monkey? Is that what you call this guitar teaser?"

Conceptione drew herself up haughtily and gave him a contemptuous look.

"You are impudent!" she said coldly. "And my father has lost his reason. A Gonzalez does not appear in public—*on a stage!*"

"Well, can you beat that!" burst out the astonished manager. "In the United States a million girls would jump at the opportunity. Swarms of them hang about my anteroom every day—begging for a chance—the tiniest part—or even a place in the back row of the chorus. I offer *you* a contract—your name in the lights—and—hell! What's the use?" He turned with an appealing gesture to Don Ramon, who was still eying the gold with greedy calculation.

The old man arose and faced his daughter.

"You *shall* obey me!" he cried in a rage. "I will not be spoken to in this manner. Contina!" he cried to the servant, and the old woman shuffled hastily to his side. "Pack the luggage and prepare to descend the mountain with the Señor Raphael. You will go when the Pearl of the Tropics sails, and I will hear no more nonsense!"

The fire of the ancient grantees was in his eyes, and his old body stiffened with dignified severity as he shot at his daughter a withering glance. Raphael grinned and turned away discreetly. Conceptione seemed to waver for an instant. Then she held out her arms appealingly to her father—looked pleadingly at him—and her expression was one to arouse the pity of a stone image. But Don Ramon stood obdurate.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "Be gone. Get ready! There is no time to be lost."

Conceptione burst into tears. Her slender shoulders shook, and her sobs echoed through the *patio*.

"She ought to do a good job in an emo-

tional scene—with a little training," mused Raphael, and then the manager started. His eyes nearly bulged from his head. Outside the *hacienda* walls there sounded a fusillade of shots. The clatter of hoofbeats rang out upon the coquina roadway, and a moment later Miguel rode abruptly into the courtyard, pulled up his horse, and fired once more in the air. He presented a far different figure from the lazy lout who had slunk through the gate the previous evening. His costume was equally gay, but his expression was dark and forbidding. Two bandoliers filled with cartridges were slung about his shoulders. In one hand he held an automatic and another was slipped in a holster at his side. A long knife gleamed from his belt and a carbine was slung from his saddle.

Raphael drew back discreetly, an expression of astonished fear upon his features. Don Ramon looked upon the menacing figure with indignation, mingled with apprehension, as he glanced at the pile of gold. But Conceptione, wiping the tears hastily from her eyes, hastened to the side of the horseman, and placing her shapely hands upon his knee, mutely sought his protection.

"I *knew* you would come in time, Miguel mine!" she breathed softly. He smiled down at her, and gently stroked her silky hair, reassuringly.

"You call me scum—sandcrab—loafer!" the horseman fairly hissed at Don Ramon. "Yet you would sell your own flesh and blood to this foreigner for a pot of gold! Bah! I spit upon you! You are unworthy to be the father of my wife. I do not know why I do not kill you and this other fat pig *now!*"

Raphael grew more uneasy, and edged toward the *hacienda* door. Miguel leveled his automatic at him and abruptly bade him stand still.

"Put the gold in my saddle-bags, Conceptione," Miguel directed. "It shall serve as thy dowry and pay for our honeymoon."

Instantly Don Ramon and Raphael uttered wails of protest, and the two started forward in their agonized excitement; but a sinister smile and a wave of Miguel's automatic effectively quieted them.

There was no sound in the courtyard, save the clink of gold pieces and the restless pawing of Miguel's horse against the stone pavement as Conceptione poured the money into the bag that was strapped to the horseman's saddle. The last piece chinked in, and she buckled the strap tightly. Then Miguel reached deftly down, and catching Conceptione about the waist, swung her up in front of him.

"*Señors, adios!*" smiled Miguel, and wheeled his horse about, overturning the table and making Raphael scurry for cover. "Should you wish to visit us, my address is that of Pancho Lopez, General of the Revolutionary Armies that have sworn to overthrow Hernando Blanco and rid Colonia of graft and political corruption! Already I am *el capitan*. One day Conceptione shall be the wife of a general—perhaps of *el presidente!*"

To complete the impression of his ferociousness of purpose, Miguel drew his other automatic and fired it rapidly into the four corners of the *patio*. Tiny scales of coquina shaled off and flew about the courtyard. Don Ramon dived into the *hacienda*, and Raphael scurried as fast as his fat legs could carry him through the archway and into the forest.

With a laugh, Miguel rode through the gate and disappeared up the mountainside. The bridle hung limp across the pommel of the saddle and the horse picked its own way swiftly toward the camp of Pancho Lopez, while Miguel pressed his lips to the red cupid's bow of Conceptione as he held her tight in his arms.

Certain that they had gone, Raphael cautiously and perspiringly returned to the *patio*. He was angry now, and having paid his gold, demanded his pound of flesh; but Don Ramon only shrugged and lighted a *cigarillo*.

"What is to be done?" he inquired resignedly. "You heard. The villain has

joined the rabble of Lopez, the bandit. It is lucky he did not bring others with him, and seize us for ransom."

"I'm going straight to this *jefe* fellow, or whatever you call him!" announced Raphael furiously. "I'll have an American gunboat in the harbor before night!"

"But a gunboat can't sail up the mountain," Don Ramon reminded him, "and no raiding party can find him in the forest fastness. As for myself, I shall remove my valuables and spend the night in the city. Having a son-in-law as a member of Lopez's forces carries no immunity against future raids!"

Raphael shuddered. "It's a damned outrage!" he said slowly. "It isn't the money I mind so much—even if a thousand dollars is a thousand dollars—it's the dancer I wanted! That bandit feller's robbed me of a quarter of a million!"

When the Pearl of the Tropics weighed anchor, shortly before sundown, a little group of three looking down from the Gonzalez *hacienda*, watched her propellers stir the calm waters of the bay. "He is gone," announced Don Ramon, and took a sip of rum. "Evidently he did not even stop to pay his respects to *el jefe*."

Conceptione laughed deliciously. "It was really a shame. I should like to have gone to—have danced in New York—and to have seen my name in the great lights!"

"Bah!" snapped Miguel. "One day we will go together—and see others dance—and live in the great hotels, and buy whatever you like. But," he added, turning impatiently to Don Ramon, "use more judgment in the future. A theatrical manager is well enough—and a thousand dollars will purchase Conceptione a new gown—but the next time you invite a guest here—make sure he is a millionaire. Business like this is too trivial. It is more simple to rob a bank!"



"THE UNCONQUERED SAVAGE"

BY RICHARD BARRY

An unusual serial of the American Indian, will start soon.

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by Rex Parson



Part V

Author of "Southwest of the Law," "The Desert Thrill," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BOBBY GETS HIS.

YOU will have to excuse me if I don't dwell on the details of that next morning. There are some things a man can't talk or write about. If I were to put down just the way I feel yet about that morning's performance, I'd need asbestos paper, and the presses would have all their bearings burned out.

Then, I had a terrible headache to begin with. Bobby had somebody fill me up on black coffee, and that helped a little. But coffee never did anything but make me nervous in the long run. And I was fairly shaky.

And going out to that Godforsaken place in the dark didn't help either. There's never any twilight worth mentioning in the tropics, and we got to the appointed field with so little light that the big bamboos around it had it looking like a cemetery.

I'd supposed it would really be a field—an acre or two, at least. It wasn't much bigger than a town lot. A man who had had practice like the baron couldn't miss in the limits of that plot.

Two men got there about the same time

as we did. Bobby explained that the fat one with the color of fumed oak was the doctor. The black one was his chauffeur before the revolutions had got his car away from him.

"What's he for?" I asked.

"If you pull yourself together to do your duty, he's here to pronounce that the baron's dead," Bobby spoke encouragingly. He certainly didn't look to me like a man who'd help much to keep me from being dead.

"Was he the best you could get?" I demanded.

"Tony—that's the baron's second—says he's the best on the island. Studied in England, finished in Paris. Ought to be good, eh?"

I couldn't help thinking that most things aren't what they ought to be. My thinking was interrupted by the appearance of the baron and the caramel dude. The baron stood apart and scowled at me, while Bobby and the caramel attended to business. They paced off twenty-five of the shortest paces I ever saw. Then they examined the pistols together, and the yellow mongrel said he was satisfied. The baron was satisfied, too. They put in three car-

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tridges apiece, and the baron said he was satisfied with those.

Bobby came up and told me: "All right—go to it! Tony and I both count, one—two—three; and at three you begin firing, continuing the three shots as fast as you like."

He led me to one end of the line he and the other had paced off. The mulatto took the baron to the other end of it.

Ever look into the face of a man all ready to kill you? There wasn't a doubt in that little brute's mind that he was going to puncture my heart with the first shot. There wasn't a doubt in mine either. I tried to sight down the thin muzzle of that pistol.

All I could see was the pistol down which he was looking at me. I could tell by the position of it that, if I were to bend my face down to the spot where Bobby had pinned the red heart, all I would need would be an electric torch to see the bright end of the bullet through the barrel. That cold-blooded little beast was as calm as if he did this sort of thing every day before breakfast. He knew I was green at it.

"One!" I tried to steady myself. I could only wonder how many seconds Bobby was giving me to live by the number he put between the "one" and the "two."

"Two!" Lord! How could he say it? Bobby had never seemed like that to me before.

"Three!"

Half of it was lost in a deafening crash. I felt a stab of pain go through my heart. As I sank I pulled the trigger of my gun harder. Then I dropped it and clutched at the awful pain. My hand felt the slippery wet. I drew it away—saw the crimson stain on it—lay still.

"Good God!" I could hear it but faintly, as if it came from a world I was already leaving. "What—what did it?"

That was Bobby.

"*Cosa de diablo?*" the yellow dandy was screaming on his way to the side of his principal.

I closed my eyes. I had always supposed that a bullet in the heart meant such instant death as would almost prevent a man's feeling the hurt. It seemed to me

that I was through hours of torture before merciful oblivion shut down on me. I felt the rough hands of that fake doctor jabbing at the wound above my heart. I heard his voice in laughter. There ought to be a law against giving half savages degrees in medicine. Bobby was pretty crude, of course; but I had heard nothing from him but horrified whispers.

Then the doctor went away from me, and I heard that yellow nigger talking to Bobby.

"He think 'e is paralyze by to be shot in the head," he laughed. "'E send ze word of dying—is honor it eez satisfy!"

"Could you beat it?" Bobby asked. How I wished for life to beat him.

"Better for us that to beat it!" yelled the caramel. "'Ere approach the *agentes de policia*. We are pinch."

But the doctor was ahead of them, and I judge, hadn't noticed their approach. He gave another of his heartless laughs.

"Señor Bobby!" he shouted half way down those twenty-five paces. "We've got the two best cases of shell-shock ever seen!"

Which showed that he knew no more than I had thought in the first place. Maybe what I had thought was blood was the undried paint on Bobby's red heart. Maybe the bullets were chalk, with aluminum paint on the tips of them, as Bobby and Tony tried to convince the police with ocular demonstration. But the pains I had weren't shell-shock. I'd had neuritis before, and I've had lots of it since. And that is what I had then, right at my heart. And it kept me in bed the rest of the day. That doctor saw he was wrong himself after a while.

"Of course any severe shock would emphasize the pain in the heart region," he admitted to me. "Scared as you were—"

"Scared like hell!" I snapped at his medical ignorance. "That may account for the other fellow. And you couldn't blame a little shrimp like him for being scared at the idea of fighting a regular-sized man. But this pain would make anybody feel faint and sick. Shell-shock! I wish you had it for about two minutes. You'd be shell-shocked, too."

Anyhow, he decided that I'd better go to

bed on the ship than appear in court to answer a charge of attempted murder. The baron had really made himself sick with fright and had to be taken home and put to bed, too. It seemed that the caramel dude was the scion of some big family, and Bobby was known to be in line for the guest of honor of to-morrow's *fiesta*. So the police held the youngsters on the yacht and sent for Belito. They were wise that a good many things that happen ought to be kept from the papers, and weren't sure but this was one of them.

Belito was sure. He came down all by himself and got the precious pair of monkeys alone under the awning right behind my cabin. I don't know what he said to the native rah-rah boy; but what he gave Bobby was enough to calm the fat kid's exuberance down for a few hours anyhow.

"It is, my young friend, in view of the truly great service you have rendered the island in clearing it of the revolutionary element—"

"Say," Bobby interrupted, "did you get Porcoso yet?"

"We shall attend to Porcoso and De Vita in good time," the *presidente* said stiffly enough to remind Bobby where he stood. "As I was saying, it is in view of your previous services that I am keeping you from the punishment due an accomplice in an unlawful affair of this sort. I might add that, while the letter of the law penalizes dueling as homicide, I myself have always felt that such cases held the sanction of usage older than our laws here.

"As for your attempt to turn such an affair into a mere bit of buffoonery, I hope you will pardon me for saying I cannot but regard it as another instance in proof of your unfortunate congenital disability to grasp even the principles of things that are above the price to be counted in dollars. I know that Señor Antonio here will be properly spanked by his father, and will come to understand better the requirements of men of station. I do not imagine your father will do anything to you; but you will live in a land where such jests as this may possibly be appreciated as comic."

A little of that kind of talk was the kind of thing Bobby was likely to need every

day for twenty years. It held him for a little while anyhow. I'd have enjoyed it more if it had held him quiet, instead of getting him in to tell me all over how big a fool he was, and how much better these people were than he ever could be.

"There I thought I was doing just the right thing in fixing it so you two would have your little scrap without anybody getting really hurt," he said. "I never can see all the sides of anything. I haven't any inherited background to show these things to me. I'm not even good as a mere millionaire's son. Belito doesn't quit thinking I'm a poor dub where my father begins.

"Say, you've got to buck up and get me out of here. I have to take enough at home, without having the governor get down here in time to give it to me right before Dolores. Of course I can't ever marry her—I'm not fit for that. But I don't like the idea of being bawled out by my dad in front of her, at that."

It struck me that I'd be quite satisfied to get away before his father came down. Only, I'm improving my chances by lying still and resting. The boys had orders to show up at noon. I had Sandy in to tell them they could have another half day of the *presidente's fiesta*. I figured that I'd be able to go up to the *palacio* for dinner, and that I'd find out a lot more about what Dolores really meant, and know whether it might be worth my while ever to come back to the island.

Still affected in the mind I was. To imagine that Bobby would stay down in the mouth for twelve whole hours or more! Along about two o'clock Sandy came in again. He was redder in the face and more pleased-looking than I'd ever seen him.

"How you feeling now?" he inquired in a kind of rattled voice.

"Better—much better," I told him. I don't think he knew anything about the duel.

"Oh, say—before I forget it—Bobby took a two-gallon can of linseed and a ten-pound keg of white lead ashore with him a little bit ago. Was it all right?"

Off again. But I didn't get much time to worry over it just then.

"What I come in for," says Sandy,

"was to tell you that Miss Belito, the *presidente's* daughter, is down to see you."

What do you know about that? Well, perhaps you know what I ought to have known and didn't. If all this strain had affected my heart as it had, it's not to wonder that my mind wasn't working up to par. It ought to have warned me, sat right up in my head and yelled, "Beware!" Bobby had it worn out so it couldn't sit up.

Oh, I suppose there wasn't anything much to the visit anyhow. She'd not been told how I got that way; she'd heard I'd had a stroke or something. Seeing that I was sufficiently recovered to stand the shock, she told me that poor, dear Baron de Sabarilla had been the victim of a regular stroke of paralysis that morning, and was still in bed, too, though now able to move his hands and limbs.

But she'd brought along some nice things for me to eat—and a couple of bottles of cognac. I'll still say it was mighty thoughtful of her.

Bobby? Oh, yes—how was his headache? Her father had missed him greatly at the day's festivities. Her father certainly hoped he'd be able to enjoy those of the morrow in his own honor.

Gone ashore, had he? Oh, well—then he must be better. That was good. But—

Was I able to tell her the rest of that story about the time I had to bring the Typhoon out of the big storm into Hawaii? She had been crazy to hear it all day.

And she held my hand while I told it.

I didn't go up to the *palacio* that evening, though. She hadn't been gone more than an hour, and I had been fussing along to get myself dressed to suit me most of that, when Bobby came back.

"Gee! I'm glad you're up and around again. Say, I'm going to show this little old island one celebration it will remember when all the regular aristocracy has gone as dusty as that darned mountain. You know, I'm kind of sick of her father's stuff about heritage and all that. Anyhow—listen.

"You're going to take the two ships out with all the big bugs of the place—around

to the other side of Monte Negro. I'm going to give an exhibition of flying there. Take it from me, I've got one grand little idea. If it works—but what's the sense of talking about it before we try it out."

There wouldn't have been much sense in his talking to me about anything. I was figuring that, with mere money on an airship, and the other representative of available aristocracy laid up in bed at home—there ought to be some chance for the aristocracy of an admiral with the *presidente* and his lovely daughter aboard the flag-ship for the day. But something did wake up to warn me that, with Bobby coming back to life as he was, it might not hurt to get in my application before his exhibition should get too interesting.

I don't really know whether he told me what his latest big idea amounted to or not.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DREAM OF LOVE.

THINGS started the next day pretty much to suit me. Bobby stayed on the former German gunboat. It was equipped with arrangements for handling the *aéroplane*, and he seemed to want to stay there. The boys had helped him get the plane hauled up early in the morning.

The news had got to everybody by the mysterious means they have of getting it all over the island by wireless. Most of the island was down to see us off. Bobby had kind of billed the show as a naval review.

You can imagine and save me time writing about the kind of review two ships would make. The Typhoon had flags from end to end, the way we always fixed her up for yacht-club affairs. The gunboat was decked out with a full set of signal flags and as much green and white as she could carry. The guns at the fort boomed off a salute, and we boomed the gunboat's in answer.

That was all we could pull off over and above a pleasant party. Obviously Bobby intended to be the whole show. Since he had already exhibited about all the stunts

any sane airman ever tried with a hydro-aëroplane, and some no hydro was meant for—it struck me that I would be mighty glad to see a ship with his father aboard, before he had time to try out something no hydro could possibly do.

Two mysteries promptly developed. The first was Bobby's possible reason for insisting that we run the vessels eight miles to sea, to leeward of the island. Bobby said he wanted lots of room for his exhibition, and plenty of water to fall into. But that hardly explained.

Still he was giving the show. I didn't undertake to spoil it for him.

The mystery of the paint and brush was solved a little after we rounded the volcano's point. Only the solution of that mystery was more of a mystery than the one it solved. Why under the sun should he have smeared white paint over about a hundred feet of the rocky side of the mountain?

Of course there is really no greater mystery to that than to about everything else there is of Bobby. Bobby is the kind to set the world afire, all right; and then to find out that he's burned his own house with it. The longer that morning lasted, the more I wondered what the youngster really thought he was doing.

Having got us out far enough from shore so that it took a good glass to see that the crowds had gathered on the low hills toward the creek where we had first entered, and where it was mighty hard to see that they would be able to see anything he did, Bobby gave us a lovely exhibition of skimming the water, with Sandy Macay aboard to help get everything in perfect condition. All that might have interested San Comosellamans if he had never shown them anything else. As it was, they were about as bored as could be, with the exception of a few of them who got sick on the motion of the ship at that distance from the mountain's shelter.

But there wasn't a dull minute for me during the forenoon. Dolores had managed to chat with me enough before we came to anchor, to show that she was going to find chatting with me much more interesting than she imagined any flying

program was likely to become. Shortly after we had got to Bobby's prescribed eight miles, she was back again.

Nobody aboard seemed to know anything about that strange white spot. How had it got there? She was sure I must know something about it.

Well, I told her that Bobby had taken a lot of paint with him when he went ashore yesterday. It had been white paint.

It happened that her father came up to us at that moment. She turned to him. And I noticed that her face was almost as white as the paint. He seemed to know what made it white.

"No, dear," he said in English. "It isn't on the spot, or I'd be inclined to think that foolish boy had the notion he could blow our mountain out this side for us. The real place is almost a mile above the top of that white blot. If I thought he contemplated anything like that, I'd have the admiral here set sail for Mexico City and keep going for forty or fifty miles. Dearly as I'd love to see that mountain blow out up there, I wouldn't take in the sight with anything less than a high-powered glass from twenty-five miles off—not for anything in the world."

The girl was quiet for a while, then. Her father was around for some minutes before he went off to speak to some one of the prominent citizens aboard with us. We had all the first citizens on the Typhoon, I should judge. With their wives and sons and daughters there were nearly fifty of them. The seventy-odd of San Comosellama's second best were aboard the gunboat.

"You don't think," Dolores said, as soon as her father was out of earshot, "that Bobby would do anything as foolish as that?"

"I think the more foolish a thing is, the more he's apt to try it," I told her. "But I don't think he could do that if he tried. He'd kill himself—and he has sense enough to know that much."

She was quiet for a while longer. Then, all at once, she sprung on me:

"Admiral, is it true that you and Baron de Sabarilla fought a duel? There's some sort of rumor around about it."

I didn't know just which way the wind might blow about it. I hesitated.

"Oh, you did!" she exclaimed, since I hadn't denied the charge. "I'm ashamed of you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. And the baron's always been like a second father to me—he is my godfather, you know. What in the world did you—"

"Your godfather!" I was gasping. "Why—why—I thought you—your father was planning to marry you to him."

You ought to have heard her laugh. For a minute it had me terribly bothered. "If—if I'd only known that—" I began, without going on to say more.

"But"—I started another tack—"your father seems so set on your marrying nobility. And the baron is the only regular nobleman—I mean the European kind—that I've met."

She laughed again. "Oh, father isn't so set on a nobleman exactly. He has an awfully exalted notion about me, that it must be quite a personage, don't you know. I guess the President of the United States would do for him. The trouble is, of course, that, a young man isn't apt to be much of a heavyweight in anything, unless it's by heritage."

Well, I'd made up my mind I must know something definite some time. Her eyes wandered over to where Bobby was just sending Sandy off aboard the gunboat. I thought I'd better bring them back.

"I suppose an admiral wouldn't be big enough for him?" I got out after choking on it three times.

"Er—er—pardon me," she came back, absently. But I had got started on the next sentence, and didn't dare drop it.

"Anyhow, if I'm not too old, you've got an admiral as nearly at, your feet as he dares get before all this crowd."

She looked down at me—radiantly. My heart turned three airsprings of hope.

"Oh, the only difficulty is that you're not old enough. But, at that, I've adopted you already. I've always lacked and always wanted a grandfather. You ought to be a little more wrinkled and grayer—but I'm sure I'll never be able to beat you other ways. There—do you like your adopted granddaughter?"

A grandfather. *Her* grandfather! Could you beat that?

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GRANDFATHER OF ALL GUNS.

OF course, now that I'm sobered up from my jag of Bobby, I'm only blessed thankful that she didn't want me for anything nearer. I'll admit that she could have had me—then. It gives me the shivers right now to think where I'd have been, tied up to a fool girl like that. *Her grandfather!* It will take me twenty years to get as old as her father. But I was sore enough over it then for it to have been something really serious. I'll say that I handed her a little of what she deserved, though. Just as soon as I could get my breath I looked straight at her.

"You'll have to excuse me," I said. "I want to get a note over to Mr. Oakes. There's something I'd forgotten to congratulate him about."

I walked off with all an admiral's dignity and then some, and got to my room. But I didn't write any note to Bobby. I hadn't been there ten minutes when a boy came in and handed me a note from him. Before I could tear it open I heard a roar of the plane's motor again. I hadn't read ten words before there was a shout from the crowd aboard. I took the letter on deck to read after seeing that Bobby was at last actually commencing his over-announced exhibition flight. He had put Sandy off. He was going alone. He was headed upward at the stiffest angle he could command with his motors. I finished the letter while he climbed. Here it is:—

DEAR ADMIRAL:

You know what I am, about as well as anybody I've met, though most people hold the same opinion of me as you do. Damfool was coined to fit my case. I was born that way; I'll never get over it. There's no use my living. My foolishness has already spoiled that for me, as well as everybody else.

But it has dawned on me that there's a way for me to be of some good. I knew all the time that I couldn't blow up that mountain without being blown to pieces with it, after I'd felt what it did to a plane a thousand feet above it when it is quiet. Besides, of

course, I wasn't going to blow up Dolores with the rest of them. So, doing what I'm going to do will be my finish.

But all the people in San Comosellama will be blessing me for generations to come for blowing out the off-side of the volcano. Certainly it's the best thing I could possibly do with the slim outfit of brains I own. So, maybe it is for the best that I couldn't have Dolores. I would never have given up the chance to live with her.

The white spot I've painted on the mountain is straight below the place where the crust is so thin I found it too hot to try to paint. But I don't think I'll miss. I got that mountain down pretty well while I was flying around the island.

Please set dad right about San Comosellama, so there won't be any more trouble for Belito and decent government. I'm beginning to think Don Jaime's message was all fake; but if dad really does come down I'll be glad to have him know I did something worth while.

Yours truly,

BOBBY.

As I reached the end Bobby had attained such a height that he was hardly more than a speck in the sky. The speck started toward Monte Negro. It seemed to move very slowly.

"What is he going to do?" the girl suddenly asked right at my side.

"He's going to blow out this side of the volcano," I told her mechanically.

A moment before I wouldn't have cared how she might feel about anything; but now—her face was something to wring the heart of a rock. All the fine color had left it, while she stared at me until she realized that I was telling her just what I myself believed.

Then it was turned up toward the speck on the sky. And all the clever, coquettish, up-to-date American girl in her was gone. So was all the dangerously shrewd, vivacious Latin girl. She was just a pretty little San Comosellaman, crossing herself in agonized prayer:

"Oh, no—no—no—Bobby mio! Santa Maria! Bobby—Bobby! Come back!"

And the speck started down.

"Great Scott!" I whispered. "He's going to dive at it! He's going to hit it like he hit the sub!"

Down, down—until we could easily see the wings slowly revolving in the terrible

nose-dives. But he wasn't giving himself the chance he had given himself before. He was taking this straight. I was too excited to realize that nothing could save him that way, anyhow, just as we were all too excited to recall that we were only eight of the twenty-five miles away which Belito had mentioned as the nearest safe distance. But Bobby wasn't planning to dive into the mountain. He knew that those four-inch shells had more power in them than the momentum of his falling aeroplane. Considerably less than a thousand feet above the spot he had chosen he flattened out and shot away from us. After his fall he must have been going five hundred miles an hour.

For about ten seconds it looked as if he had deliberately fooled us all. I was beginning to choke with anger at him. But he had had a purpose in his long dive. It had removed the danger of his miscalculating the drop of the shells as affected by his own momentum. An instant later we understood.

There were two puffs of white smoke some distance above the big white bull's-eye. Then—

It didn't look like anything less than the whole world blowing up at once. I knew that Bobby could not possibly escape the utter upheaval that seemed to lift whole hills of rock and hurl them skyward like huge balls from a cannon. Then I knew almost as well that we could not escape them either.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SALVAGE.

THE first thing that hit us was just the bang. It was lucky for me that I hadn't actually started up the steps to the bridge. The terrific *woof* of that explosion was sufficient to knock me down.

It broke every plate-glass window on that side of the cabin and cracked half the thick portholes below. It had everybody sprawled helter-skelter over the deck. It snapped off one of the temporary wireless masts Don Jaime had put up to replace those Porcoso's men had shot away.

Sandy Macay had sent Burney back to the Typhoon to man the engines. Burney had realized our danger before I did. We were lying broadside toward the mountain. The gunboat was more nearly pointed at it, and in safer position.

Burney had already got halfway down to the engine room when the crash hit us. He fell the rest of the way. But he didn't break any bones, and he had the engines both running full speed ahead before I could pick myself up and get to the lower wheel under the bridge.

Since everything in the nature of a clock stopped at once, it is easy for me to state that the blow-up came at a quarter after one. The sun was on our side of the mountain. It did not last long, for the whole mass of black smoke came rolling on the wind toward us. It lasted long enough to show that the ocean was blown up as well as the earth.

The earth came at us first, though. A bit of rock the size of my head smashed across the leeward end of the bridge and carried it down. A mass of stone that looked like a fair-sized house dropped into the sea not six feet from our side. Its splash nearly drowned the wife of San Comosellama's leading merchant, and had every dainty gown aboard us looking like a dishrag hung over its owner to dry.

The sky seemed fairly filling with the black meteors. I'm perfectly willing to believe that it was the fast praying done aboard us which kept any of them from hitting us so as to go clear through the bottom. I wouldn't say, though, that they didn't pray as fast on the other ship; but a stone that weighed somewhere around four hundred pounds went straight through its decks, and did enough to the bottom so that you could see her settle in the few minutes we had before the water hit.

I've read of mountains of water. A wave fifty feet high probably looks like a water mountain to a landsman. I doubt if I ever saw any wave as high as that.

But this thing that came at us—it wasn't a mountain, to be sure. But it was so near one I can't quite get myself to call it a hill. And it was the nearest to a straight cliff of water I've seen east of Niagara.

Mind, there was no sea on to make us dip. We were standing level when that heap of sea came at us. And I was on the hurricane deck, not less than thirty feet above the surface of the water. And I'm ready to take my oath that it looked to me as if the thing would go right over our masts. I wouldn't have been at all surprised to have been turned completely end over end.

The gunboat caught it about two seconds before it reached us. She had settled enough to keep her from rising at all. The wave was above her smokestack as it went over her.

I'll have to give credit to some San Comosellaman for presence of mind. Of course the fright of the thing had sent almost everybody on both ships scurrying for the cabins, with the notion of getting out of the way of the flying rocks by getting under a solid roof. But that chap on the gunboat had herded the last person aboard it inside, realizing, perhaps, that she was settling too far to do any rising at all. He was caught as he was unfastening the door to the cabin, hurled loose from it as it was swept shut by the pressure of the water, and lost overboard, with nobody seeming to recall just who he was.

The Typhoon was a different ship. Straight up and high as that wave was, she lifted to it. The forward rail, to which I was clinging, rose and struck my chest with a blow that knocked the breath and most of the consciousness from me. The deck under my feet swung away from them.

If we had climbed less than two-thirds the height of the wave, its weight must have crushed the whole deck in. As it was, all the deck chairs and everything else movable went piling back against the forward end of the cabin. Luckily they were of light willow, with the exception of a small anchor which was prevented by them from crashing through everything.

The top of the wave piled over us. I have a vague recollection of boiling foam growing pale green around me, darker green, with myriad bright bubbles through it, still darker—darker—darker.

Twice before I've nearly drowned. Each of those times I had the regular experience

of seeing all the sins of my life coming at me at once. This time I didn't. The last I remember was that there were no more bubbles.

The next I knew I was lying face down on the slats of a life raft, with the tank side of the thing under my stomach, my legs dangling over in a boiling sea, my tongue pulled away out of my mouth, and somebody trying to work my hands as if I were swimming in the air. If anything in this world is more painful than being pumped out after a near drowning it's something I haven't had.

"Don't!" I pleaded. "For God's sake, let me die easy!"

"No—no—don't talk that way. You've got to live. I—I don't know whether I've a father any more, or anybody. You'll have to be my grandfather now."

Dolores!

And I began to sense some of what she was having to do. The sea was an utter tumble, rocking the little raft like a cork, splashing over it, whirling it around, whirling it back again, tipping us this way and that—and she had dragged me up this far; clinging to the slats with one hand only when she must to keep us both aboard the treacherous bottom, she had kept me where I was—kept up the movements of my arms—brought me back to life again.

Suddenly I recalled a foolish dream I had had. Also I recalled some harsh opinions I had formed. If she wanted me for a grandfather or a lapdog, it was up to me to stand for it. I did a little struggling on my own behalf.

"We can hold on a little longer," I heard her calling louder above the hiss of waters about us. Then I managed to get my eyes opened and look up enough to see the boat that was standing in to catch us. Pete Ryan was handling her alone—a four-oared lifeboat. In another moment he had me and then the girl aboard.

And he had four others of us. There was Sweeny, swearing that he could do a little, if Ryan would only give him an oar. The rest were lying helpless in the bottom. The *presidente*, with a blue mark over his eye, was white and still, and looked as if he were dead, until Dolores went at him

and fairly dragged him to life, as she had dragged me from the water. There was a native who had been standing beside him when the big wave struck. He was groaning with a broken arm. The black steward, who was the fourth passenger ahead of us, seemed unable to do a thing but roll his eyes in deadly terror.

Ryan was having his hands full to keep the boat up in a drunken sea that spun with a thousand eddies, leaped up in jagged points of water, sucked down in hollow whirlpools, rolled, not in straight waves to which a man might hold a boat's head, but with crisscrossed motions such as you might produce in miniature by dancing a bowlful of water up and down and in all directions.

And then my heart leaped to life again. There was the old Typhoon—God bless the men who built her! Her bridge was gone, her awnings were tangled shreds where they had not been swept entirely off with the stanchions, her rails twisted puzzles of steel piping, her masts and her big ventilator smokestack only stumps. But the cabin, though entirely windowless, was still on her. From where I was I could not detect that her hull was down at all.

Even while I looked, Johnny Sweeny raised a yell.

"By —, he's got something going!" It was true. The oil smoke was shooting up from the broken-off end of exhaust pipe that had come up inside the stack.

Little good was to come of that, though. The propeller on that side of the vessel was gone. So, too, I now perceived, was the rudder.

Then I saw the former German gunboat. It was in a sad plight. Almost weird was the way she was keeping an even keel, having been struck fairly amidships by the lava rock. But her decks were hardly six feet above the surface. All aboard her were now on top.

And it struck me that we had not really been saved at all. A vast roar—something like the hiss of a huge rocket raised to the thunderous volume of an artillery duel between the giant demons of hell—smote my ears a second time, and I realized that it was the sound of the volcano continuing

its eruption. More huge rocks bombarded the sea all about us.

Already I perceived that the tremendous heat was driving upward all the air around the mountain; that for the first time since I had known the island the wind was blowing from the west into the vacuum thus created. In a matter of minutes it would rise to the force of a hurricane, a cyclone. And everything that continued to float would be driven inevitably in at the fearful vortex. The gunboat could hardly float long enough to suffer that fate. For the Typhoon no other seemed possible. And we aboard the lifeboat stood almost the least chance of all.

Before the west wind the thick haze of gaseous smoke swiftly thinned. Out of it suddenly loomed a precarious hope for our lives, and that which promised to render me as nearly as possible indifferent to life or death since it might easily bring to me ruin, disgrace, and even prison. It was the American armored cruiser I had first beheld over the Typhoon's stern, blocking the yacht's return to liberty from the creek on San Comosellama's southwestern shore.

Little enough attention I had paid of late to those three vessels of my homeland's navy. My ship had been commanded by the island's various governments, and, until to-day, had kept within the sacred precincts of the three-mile limit.

It seemed that the green and white flag which floated simultaneously from the fort and from our stern had protected us in our excursion out of bounds, since orders from Washington had not included stopping the theoretically friendly nation's warships. But the cruiser, being the only vessel of sufficient size to attack the gunboat with impunity, had been detailed to watch us from a distance. She had lain well off, prepared to intercept us if we headed toward either of the islands nearest, the one a hundred miles to the west by north, the other a hundred and seventy-odd to the southwest.

The cruiser had caught the tidal wave much reduced, and suffered little damage. But, seeing us disappear into the cloud of smoke and ashes and flying lava, she had pushed in at full speed to rescue us.

Rescuing us was no such easy matter as telling of it. All aboard the gunboat were taken off: The Typhoon was given a heavy hawser. She was to need it.

Before these preparations could be accomplished the gale had mounted into the sort of storm for which the yacht was named. Great waves piled in upon us before we had been dragged a mile farther from the center of the cyclone. The cruiser had such a job of towing as should have gone down into history so as to give credit to the men aboard her.

Night found us actually backing up in spite of the powerful pull of the navy vessel. It was a thousand times more horrible than day, with the huge volcano belching forth flame to lighten the sky for a hundred miles; with the hurtling rocks glowing, either from their own heat or the reflected light of the monster gun that had hurled them; with the waves piling higher and higher, their crests tipped with red by the flare upon them.

The passengers of yesterday's pleasure excursion were mostly in the miseries of seasickness, and drenched by the storm through the open windows. The cabins were constantly awash. We could barely manage to keep ahead of the rising water with a donkey engine on a pump.

Day brought no relief. I was never before so nearly ready to give up a ship. About an hour before noon the hawser parted. We could not have been ten miles off from the foot of the mountain. In an instant we had started back toward it.

In—in—in toward the rocks we were borne. We missed one jagged spur by half the length of the ship—were swept clear past it. But the white breakers were hardly a mile to the east of us. We were heading in toward them faster, I believed, than the yacht's propellers had ever sent us.

We sheered off them in a swift eddy. The wind seemed suddenly to die. We swept around the point, around that island on which two of us had once spent nearly twenty-four hours of Bobby's swift life as exiles. The cruiser drew in alongside.

"I thought I'd lost you that time," the white-faced captain admitted to me. "We couldn't take our draft through there."

We made the two ships fast together then. It seemed to us that our way was clear into the harbor. From the fort to a point well behind us the water lay as smooth and placid as if the outer seas were not being lashed to suds.

The captain came aboard the Typhoon. As yet he had nothing to say about what he purposed to do to the captain of the blockade runner, or the vessel herself. Our safety was the first consideration. We chatted of the peril through which we had passed. I told him what had started it all.

"Bobby Oakes—the mascot of the Blank!" he cried in sudden excitement. "I wonder if it could have been he?" God knows where either of the destroyers is now—but—

"Say, old man—what do you make of that?"

I looked where he pointed. I looked again. He offered me his glass, and I looked through that.

Porcoso's flag was floating over the top of the fort. Swiftly I swept the skyline of the island, and picked out the *Palacio de Gobierno*. Porcoso's flag flew over that.

"By Jove! There's the Blank now!" cried the naval officer. He was pointing to the wharf at the far end of the harbor. Sure enough, there was the long, low hull of the one destroyer. "Thank God, they're safe," he added, fervently.

I handed him back his glass. He got it pointed at the *palacio*—held it there a moment.

"Love of Mike!" he gasped. "Here's trouble for fair. Look up there!"

They were a splendid pair of prismatic glasses. I had to shift the focus a little. Then I was ready to gasp, too.

The plaza was a fighting, scrambling mass of men. Most of the shooting seemed to produce only the tiny puffs of thin gas of a pistol's discharge. But at least every third man of that crowd wore the uniform of the United States marines.

As I watched, they seemed to work in together—to form themselves into a flying wedge. They were hard pressed, but pressing harder. Slowly, surely, they wedged their way between the halves of their op-

ponents, closer and closer to the steps of the *palacio's* porch.

Some fighters, those boys! But their leader seemed to me a wonder. How he could remain the very point of the wedge and last a minute was all but a miracle in my eyes.

Shooting, using his fists occasionally, hammering with the butt end of his gun when there was no time to change clips—he kept on. On and on, until he flung aside the two men between him and the very door of the big building.

The wedge widened. The men who resisted it gave way. At last they broke and started to flee in both directions. And the leader turned around, as he pushed open the door. The captain saved his glass by catching it as it dropped from my trembling fingers.

I had seen beyond the shadow of a doubt the plump features, the wrinkled brow over the baby-blue eyes of Bobby Oakes!

CHAPTER XXVII.

OH, SAY, CAN YOU SEE?

THE young lieutenant on the cruiser had been getting us started on in, while the captain and I were getting our long-distance views of the battle on the hill. The people inside were pulling themselves together, now that the ship seemed to be riding quietly, and putting their heads out of the windows to see what was up. Those aboard the cruiser had taken the storm more easily, and a lot of them were getting on deck.

They had hardly had time to glimpse the blue and red flag on the fort before it was hauled down, the fort changing its allegiance as usual, without bothering to pull off the hopeless fight about it. But the Señor Belito had come around enough to get interested in the fact of its having been up, so that he had Dolores help him to the deck to see what it was all about.

They didn't run another flag up on the fort right away. There was no flag up on the *palacio* staff for them to go by. It worried Belito that they didn't get his green and white banner floating immediately.

"It must be that that scoundrel, Porcoso, has destroyed it utterly. It must be. I'll hang that rascal for this yet," he fumed, between expressions of tremendous gratitude for Bobby's latest success in overcoming his enemies for him. No doubt he was the most capable man on San Comosellama, and the only one who could be depended upon to run the island with the good of its people in view. But there were points on which he seemed a bit childish; and then, of course, there is the Spanish love for the ceremonial end of things to make him take that flag business seriously.

He was destined to get the flag stuff handed him as a regular shock. We had steamed in pretty well—with the fort almost abeam and the whole city quite clear to the naked eye—before the new flag went up at all. I was facing the starboard side of my vessel, as it happened, talking still with the navy captain, trying to get a line on where I stood with him.

Suddenly I heard a shout from one of the gobs aboard the other vessel, and his hand went up to his little white hat in salute, and he took that smart, straight-as-a-poker attitude which is called, and is, attention. Before I could turn around a dozen more of the sailors and marines were snapping themselves into the same position. The captain suddenly straightened and got his hand up, remarking with anything but the reverent awe his salute might have indicated:

"Now—what the hell is that?"

And then I saw; and, in spite of everything "that" was to me and to him, I knew he was putting it mildly. It was the Stars and Stripes! On the fort!

The captain thought of his duty and bawled something to the lieutenant, who bawled it to his men. But a bugler had rushed down without orders and already got started worrying his horn through:

Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light?

Nobody stopped him. It went well with the shaking out of Old Glory by the cruiser. Just then the lieutenant on the destroyer got the same idea, and I got it—only that Ryan had beaten me to it and was already busy with getting a piece of spar lashed to

the frame between two windows to carry the Flag of Freedom.

"But the flag of San Comosellama—where is it?"

It was Señor Belito asking the question almost savagely. And my mind accomplished a bloodless revolution away from the idea that Bobby's first thought was to honor us in our return from near shipwreck. The flag of San Comosellama—the green and white which still represented the only real government the place had ever had—ought to have been up, too.

And it was to be remembered that the American flag had not meant much to Belito but trouble. Three war vessels had been standing off his harbor for weeks, to assist one of the revolutionists against his authority. The originator of the whole revolutionary idea had got all his backing from America. I think about the one aversion to Bobby he had been unable to overcome was Bobby's nationality.

"Well, now we are in for trouble," groaned the captain.

It was only the gobs who were happy over it. Any United States army or navy man knows that the only way to settle the trouble anywhere is to take the place and run up the Red, White, and Blue over it. But the officers sometimes have to consider what is going to be said and done to them by the bunch at Washington.

There were no orders out to capture San Comosellama. There were probably all kinds of international reasons why no such orders were the least bit likely. The whole thing is a lot worse than d'Annunzio swiping Fiume, for Uncle Sam hasn't even a concealed desire to own San Comosellama.

And there are all the outward signs of occupation. It wasn't likely to make me any happier, either, with that other vessel's captain suddenly remembering to inquire of me:

"What in the devil did you mean by bringing that young lunatic down here? You're the one to answer for this!"

I ought to have known better than to make the answer which sprang to my mind. I'm glad I didn't.

"What about your marines up there?" I asked him.

"Gr-r-umph!" It was the noise of his mouth going shut. He stared up the hill for a minute. Then he turned to me with a grin on his face and one eye showing just a trace of a wink.

"I'm wondering just how much of this we'd better leave out of the reports anyhow?" he whispered.

"I reckon we'll know better after a while." I spoke with a calmer feeling in my heart than I'd known for some weeks.

It was as near a prophecy as I've ever come. What we got to know was mostly this:

Bobby had entirely lost control of his plane when the mountain blew up under his two bombs, though he was already a mile beyond the mountain blowing the other. The machine had nearly lost a wing in the sudden flattening at the end of the long dive; and the blast of the volcano put it practically out of commission. It came down in a mixup of spins and somersaults which had even Bobby guessing. It missed our former isle of exile by inches and dived into the harbor.

Nothing ever had killed Bobby, and it seems as if nothing ever will. He got out and swam ashore. The airtanks of the pontoons kept the plane afloat about forty-two seconds after he got clear of it.

The destroyer had been forced by the storm to seek what shelter it could get in the harbor. Its sister-destroyer had managed to run away for safety. Bobby saw it coming, and managed to signal his distress with his coat. It was not alone in seeing him, or in starting a boat for him. Two small sailing craft were running for the little island as Bobby boarded the life-boat of the destroyer.

Ashore, meanwhile, a lot of things had taken place. Porcoso was one of them. He had discovered that the whole city was down the island to get a view of the fancy flying, and Belito off on the ship. De Vita and he had marched unimpeded to within half a mile of the city when the mountain blew up.

He must have thought that his revolt had come off simultaneously with another in which Satan had usurped the functions of Providence, to remove the last serious

enemy to his schemes by a blast from the volcano by which its perils, too, might be forever turned away from his easily won domain. He entered the city, ran up his flag at the *palacio*, had his men fire a few guns to attract sufficient attention from the fort. De Vita rattled off the usual formula proclaiming Porcoso dictator pending the holding of an election in accordance with the venerable constitution of the nation. It was all over—but Bobby.

In a little while back came the population. Bobby's fireworks had been a little too much for regular pleasure, until a view from the city's hill-top showed that the long-dreamed rescue of the island from its natural peril had been accomplished. Save for a wind which might knock a loose tile off a roof or blow down an insecure sign, the city and the island behind it were safer than their churches had ever been before.

San Comosellama is good to remember a hero about as long as the next place. It's better than most places about going wildly enthusiastic over him while it remembers. It is the flying man who has done this great thing for San Comosellama.

Three cheers for the flying man! Rather, a hundred bravos! At least another week of *fiesta*! All the fireworks that are left!

It is not certain whether the flying man is human, angelic, or diabolic. San Comosellama should worry over that! Look what he's done!

And San Comosellama never stopped to look and see what sort of government it has for the moment. It saw the flying man go past the mountain toward the harbor, doing the fanciest flip-flops he has shown them yet. The one important thing is to find him and to do him honor while the honoring is good. San Comosellama got down to the water-front by all the short cuts it knew.

The boats that put off were too late to beat those from the Americanos' destroyer. San Comosellama was bitterly disappointed Bobby, interested only in the fates of the two ships his folly had probably sent to the bottom, refused to leave the destroyer to be honored.

All the candidates for the San Comosellaman presidency, Belito excepted, are ob-

sessed with the hope of ridding themselves of the American war vessels by putting over some sort of an election which will leave the navy no excuse for keeping them there. Wherefore Porcoso, figuring that the next day will be stormy enough to make the voting thin and easily controlled, proclaimed an election.

It appears that the Typhoon's late second mate, Mr. Antonio Moran, has had a scrap with his leaders over something. He was the author of the bright idea. Secret communication of bright ideas is the insoluble mystery of places like that, but it works better than a rural telephone system. San Comosellama gets over its disappointment and goes to the bright idea.

By noon of the next day Bobby Oakes was the peak of a fever of wrath with himself for having turned the supreme act of idiocy instead of accomplishing the supreme sacrifice of his life. He was in humor for anything desperate—the more desperate the better. And a committee of prominent San Comosellamans came out in a boat to wait upon him and to inform him that he had been elected president of their country. All he needed to do was to drive Porcoso out of the Palacio de Gobierno. They were at his feet to obey his commands, and to follow him up the hill and as far after the dictator as he felt inclined to proceed.

Bobby hesitated. Being president had little appeal to his gentle nature. Kicking Porcoso off the back end of the island might serve to relieve his torn feelings. The lieutenant in charge of the destroyer assured him that it was still quite impossible for the vessel to put to sea.

"I'm on," Bobby cried in response to the popular call to duty. "Boys," he spoke to the members of the destroyer's crew, half of whom had been shipmates with him during the war, "as *presidente* of this great and glorious republic, I invite you to come ashore and see the fireworks."

The lieutenant had been aboard that same destroyer back in Bobby's day. He was no stronger than any other man when Bobby started to get something from him. The boys got shore leave. Nobody remembered to keep them from taking along

their side-arms. None of them forgot to take them.

The short, sweet scrap was almost over when we aboard the battered Typhoon first glimpsed it. The old man who ran the flagpole hurried to the new *presidente* to demand his pleasure as to flags.

"Let's see what you've got," Bobby spoke indifferently.

A chest full of flags was inspected, half the navy boys looking on. They came upon the Stars and Stripes.

"That's the best-looking flag in the lot," Bobby remarked. "It's always been good enough for me before. Run her up."

The boys said the flag was about half way up the mast; they were all standing at attention; some of them, though, were busy in explaining that the American flag did not, in this case, signify any action on the part of the American government. It was just Bobby's personal flag as an American citizen.

And Bobby caught sight of the cruiser in the harbor, with the Typhoon in tow. There are a few of them that claim he rolled all the way down that main street which leads to the wharves. But most of them are satisfied to put it that he broke all fat man's records. I'll wager that he gave a lot of Comosellamans the shock of their lives at sight of a *presidente's* total lack of *dignidad*.

And then I'll wager Señor Hernandez Belito y Estrella took a shock equal to the combined voltage that hit them all. Bobby was met at the gangplank by the destroyer's wireless operator. The cruiser had just got her outfit going, and reported all safe on board. Bobby got one of the things that pass with him for ideas. The message came back to us, like this:

Presidente de San Comosellama, Roberto Oakes, approaching by launch to thank captain and his gallant crew for their assistance to his navy. Admiral Njordstrom advised to prepare his ship for *presidente's* inspection.

It would have been all right if the message had been given me quietly. But the wireless man on the cruiser came over to our side of his vessel and yelled the whole thing across at us.

Señor Belito, sometimes *presidente* of San Comosellama and sometimes not, was reclining on the only deck-chair that was in shape to hold him, anxiously and rather savagely studying first one of the flags on his island and then the other. There was a crash of cracking wood as he fairly jumped off that chair with his whole length at once.

"*Que cosa del diablo?*" he shrieked. "What does it mean?"

"Wait—I'll ask," mildly responded the wireless man, and hurried back to his cell. Belito followed him along the Typhoon's deck to a point opposite the wireless room's door on the other vessel.

"Lieutenant Barret reports Oakes duly elected this morning. Porcoso refused to recognize validity of the election—it was held at his own order. Bobby declined to accept his refusal, and he is in full retreat to the rear of the island. Yes—that's all—

"No—wait—H-m! This is something different. Why, it's the Morro Castle, from New York—message for Don Jaime Quinlan—H-m! 'Arriving at 7 P.M. to-day. Samuel J. Oakes.'"

But Belito had retreated weakly to the remnants of his chair. Dolores came out just then with the last remnants of the only unsmashed bottle aboard the yacht. He drank it as if he needed it. It made me thirsty to watch him.

Then they talked in Spanish.

About ten minutes later the destroyer's launch comes flying toward us. I never saw Bobby make a quicker job of getting up a rope ladder than he did that time. It might have occurred to me that an admiral is supposed to salute his president. It didn't—or to Bobby, either.

"H'lo, admiral!" he greeted me, and got by me at a run. In another minute he was beside the father and daughter. He came to a dead stop. The pucker came on his forehead; the baby-blue eyes began to blink fast; the cute little mouth was drawn down at its corners and both lips were wiggling—as if he was choking back a regular bawl, and couldn't keep it in more than another second or two.

I'll say for old Belito that he took his medicine like the kind of man I know he is, for all the little oddities that make him

different from regular Americans. He got up slowly; he was still pretty miserable from all that he had been battered through in twenty-four hours.

"Señor Presidente!" he said with a low, solemn bow that must have hurt him something awful.

"Oh!" Bobby began to falter thickly. "It isn't that—not that—at all. I—I just—thought I'd—killed you all. And—oh, Dolores—Dolores! It's too—too much!"

"Señor Presidente," the old man repeated—and there was a straight smile on his face now, "as you sometimes might say—you win! I shall never admit that the *presidente* of my country is unworthy of the dignity of my daughter's hand." Then he woke up to something that we who had suffered the other end of it had failed hitherto to realize. "I shall never admit that the hand of any woman is too good for that man who took the chance you took to free my people from their age-long danger."

I wanted to see Bobby pretty badly myself. Also, I felt that he ought to know that his father was coming fast.

But some things you have to wait for.

Bobby couldn't talk; but he nearly wrung Señor Belito's hand off with one of his own. The other was engaged in a clinch with Belito's daughter. And mine were one of about five hundred pairs of eyes that quit looking, so that nobody would see them. It just goes to show what that superinfant has done to my nerves, that I couldn't even get up a proper feeling of jealousy toward Bobby.

But I had to tell him about his father. "I'll stay *presidente* only long enough for her to be able to say she married one. Then I'll resign—to take effect immediately after another election. And you'll be elected, or I'll know why," Bobby was saying as I butted in and told him of the approach of the Morro Castle.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "Dolores, we'll have to be married between now and seven. My father wouldn't stop at dragging us away from the altar to prevent anything he didn't like."

And he ran spang into the little San Comosellaman. She crossed herself in holy horror.

"...ever!" she exclaimed. "We would have no good future at all to be married without the mass and blessing."

"But, listen—" Bobby protested.

He might as well have waited for the moon to come up, and then bark at it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PLAIN PIRACY.

AND I had been congratulating myself that things would be patched up somehow, and I'd get out of it all without getting into too much else. There was no question of Bobby's ability to pay for all damages to the Typhoon, even if they should cost a few thousand more than the yacht herself had cost new. And Bobby's capacity for getting everybody into difficulties had reached out to the officers present of the United States navy, and had them where they'd surely fix up some history that would be blamed near the great definition of a "lie agreed upon."

I was figuring that about the worst worry I had left was the fear that the bride would forget her adopted grandfather when it came to the kissing party right after the ceremony. I surely was getting weak-minded in the head. As if anything or anybody could figure itself safe in the immediate vicinity of Mr. Robert Oakes!

"Where's Sandy?" Comosellama's newest *presidente* suddenly inquired.

He did the inquiring after he'd got his future father-in-law calmed down once more. The idea that any mere American father could object to his daughter as a wife for any mere American son—had never dawned on Señor Belito y Estrella. And its dawn hit him pretty hard. He but half recovered when Bobby and Dolores convinced him that Samuel J. Oakes had never laid eyes on her. Even then the old wounds were all opened up over what the said Samuel J. has done to San Comosellama and its former long-time *presidente*.

We got Sandy out of the engine room. He had been there ever since he could get off the cruiser aboard us. He and Burney had worked like Trojans—if anybody ever saw Trojans work.

"Sandy, can you get this thing to work—this ship, I mean?" Bobby asked.

"Oh, about a month will fix her up," Sandy answered as calmly as ever.

"Two hours," snapped Bobby.

The Scot simply laughed.

"Thought you'd got over some of your hurry to get home," Macay finally uttered.

"Who's talking of getting home?" Bobby came back at him. "What I want to do is to capture a ship."

"Huh?" Sandy began to look interested. I began to feel that way.

"The Morro Castle," Bobby elucidated. "She's due here at seven. We've got to capture her."

"Eh?" I put in. "Are you aware that the Morro Castle is a ship belonging to the Shipping Board of the United States of America? Where would we get off capturing her?"

"Well," Bobby argued, "these navy boats can't do it. Dad will have provided himself with papers to keep them from blocking him. It's up to the San Comosellama navy to act. You must be a swell navy if the president can't get you to stop an unarmed merchantman."

"Humph!" snorted Macay. "The president is the guy, I believe, who shot the navy up with a volcano. What does he expect?"

"Expect you to stop the Morro Castle—keep anybody from landing off her until I say so," Bobby answered him.

"That's easy," jeered the chief. "We've got one engine that will work—"

"I thought so," Bobby interrupted him.

Sandy went right on as if he hadn't been interrupted:

"Only there's no propeller left on the end of its shaft. The other engine is damaged beyond any hurry-up repairs. She needs about a thousand dollars' worth of new parts. Incidentally her pipes are full of water."

"Take the parts of the other engine for it," ordered our *presidente*. "You don't need me to tell you to drain the pipes, do you?"

"In two hours, eh?" Macay grunted. "I've got Burney here and two blacks to help me."

"I'll help," said the new-born president of a land he had not even adopted. He cast his eye over at the captain of the cruiser, whose name I'm having to leave so thoroughly out of all this. For about a minute the captain looked as if he had already passed his limit. Bobby kept looking at him.

"Oh!" he suddenly remembered. "I almost forgot to tender my thanks for the rescue. I shall cable Washington—"

"You will like hell!" was the captain's irreverent interruption. "Here comes the chief now."

In five minutes we had the cruiser's engines and most of their crew at work with us. It was during the last of those five minutes that somebody went up the warship's wireless mast and took a look to the north.

"Steamer's smoke in sight," he called down. "Headed this way, she is. Looks as if it had calmed down a good deal outside. Guess she'll make it—if she's got a native aboard to steer her in here."

Bobby groaned.

"Trust him to look out for that!" he said. "Come on. Dolores says the bishop would never marry us if he got here and objected."

Did I work, too? I surely did. So long as I kept right with them down there there was less danger that they'd get to thinking of me on the outside. I didn't want that job of stopping the Morro Castle.

It was at the American captain's suggestion that Bobby gave orders for another shift of flags, and got the original San Comosellaman colors flying once more—the green and white, against which other flags were rebels. That let the navy officers out. Theirs was simply a case of any port in a storm. But it didn't help me much. Getting out there and stopping that Shipping Board vessel was going to put the last touch on my case. I'd have all of the Oakes millions after me to see that I got investigated off the seas for life.

Two hours? Those youngsters and the near-youngsters they made of their seniors, had that engine running to suit Sandy Macay in just fifty-two minutes. The cruiser's engine crew got back where it belonged. Bobby started down the rope lad-

der—of course he would have to spend the night at his *palacio*. The launch had been making fast trips with the passengers from the Typhoon; and a bigger one had been dropped from the cruiser's davits to help and to get the wrecks home from its own decks.

"Steam right up to him, admiral," Bobby admonished. "Don't be a bit afraid. You've got the San Comosellaman government behind you."

The San Comosellaman government! Bobby Oakes!

But I had a laugh coming to me—or thought I had.

"What am I to do about those guns?" I asked innocently.

"Guns!" echoed Bobby. "Why, point them at the ship, if it acts funny. I'll have the fort do the solid-shot-across-the-bow stunt. You don't suppose I'm going to sink a ship with my father on it, do you?"

"Are you ready for us to let you go?" inquired the cruiser's captain at this juncture.

"All but one little thing," said I. I would rather have waited an hour to say it; but it was safe enough even now. "We haven't any rudder!"

Safe? No—nobody was ever safe within range of a madcap like Bobby Oakes. Ask any seaman if a jury rudder could be rigged in an hour to hold a thousand-ton vessel against the turn of one propeller out of two. He'll make the only possible answer. It can't be done—without Bobby Oakes.—

In ten more minutes the cruiser had nosed me up to the side of the wharf, made me fast, and in five more had a float of life-rafts under the Typhoon's stern. There were no less than twenty ship's carpenters and ten blacksmiths on that job; and they had three hundred helpers when they needed them. They tore up the planks from the wharf to make the rudder. They made it. Sheer man power hung it over the stern and got it into the skeg six feet below the surface.

"You could sail all the way home with that," commented the cruiser's chief carpenter. But I could have told him that my prospects were for sailing home with irons on. It's all right to play admiral for a

dinky, revolution-ridden island while nobody's around to see you make a show of yourself. But Samuel J. Oakes and Captain Donohue, of the Morro Castle, and Lord knows how many others on that blamed Shipping Board vessel—know me, know the Typhoon, and will soon know everything. Believe that I'd have sailed home if I had been as optimistic as that carpenter about that rudder.

Say I needn't have gone? You wouldn't say it if you could have seen the idolizing eyes of all those navy men whenever they light on the fair and grease-smeared features of Bobby Oakes. You would have calculated your position the same as I did—the latitude and longitude are just equal. As well to die for a sheep as a goat—with me, though, either way is to die for the monkey Bobby's made of me.

"There's your ship—go to her," Bobby commanded. "Hold her until nine to-morrow, at all hazards."

I went to it. Tell it not in Gath that I used the signal flags of a navy destroyer tied to a long boat hook lashed to the port rail to warn the approaching steamer that she was mistaking her destination. Keep it from the listening ears of Washington that I was manned by twenty-six stowaways who disguised the uniforms of Uncle Sam's sailors with any old rag they could find.

On the crooked, quarter-speed way out I sought further disguise by painting out the names on bow and stern; I reflected cheerfully that my beard had rarely shown less token of trimming than now. Perhaps the whole outfit could get by unrecognized.

The quick calming of the water had enabled the Morro Castle to improve on her expected time. It was hardly past six o'clock when we two vessels met almost opposite the fort. The steering with the improvised rudder and the uneven thrust of the single propeller was so difficult that I halted the ship while my efforts were all to get out of her way and alongside.

"What's the matter with you?" snarled the captain. "Ain't you banged up enough to suit you already?"

"Say, captain, isn't that what's left of the Typhoon, Richard Rossiter's yacht?"

demanding the voice of the man whom I had last seen producing a regular case of seasickness to avoid some of the excitement through which I had since passed.

"Bless my soul, if it isn't old Square-head Njordstrom!" gasped Donohue. "Hey—*cap'n!*" Neither one of them seemed to think I could hear them. "What's the trouble?"

"No trouble at all, if you stay outside here," I tried to answer with a little ginger, as I watched my last hope of escape go glimmering to leeward. "This ship is at present the navy of San Comosellama, I'd have you understand. The president of the San Comosellaman republic has issued orders that no vessels be admitted to the harbor between six and half past eight. I'm here to see that the order is obeyed."

I thought Donohue would fall over his rail as he bellowed his laughter.

"What would you try to do to us if we did?" he inquired when he could control his voice. "Fire those little brass guns right into our vitals?"

"The fort has orders to attend to that," I retorted. And, as if for the very purpose of corroborating me, the main gun in the fort boomed over the little bay. There was a big splash on the far side of the Morro Castle.

"Say—do you fellows know that this is an American vessel? What's got into Don Jaime Quiñan, anyhow?" This came from Oakes.

"Don Jaime got into a hurry three or four days ago," I rejoined with a first glimmer of cheerfulness. "San Comosellama knows him no more."

"Great Scott! Is Porcoso—"

"No; Belito—or, rather, a man of his selection."

The selection was pretty dubious, even after the event, but I didn't care to let Oakes know he had nothing more dangerously foreign than his own son to run up against.

"What's been done with Bobby?" finally demanded the father.

And then we had a pretty little illustration of the effects of relaxed discipline. It was one of those infernal disguised gobs who shouted out a reply.

"You'd better ask what Bobby's done. Just now he's the elected *presidente* of this glorious little old nation. But that isn't a marker to some of the other things he's pulled. It was him that blowed up the mountain yesterday. Oh, I say—there's some class to Bobby Oakes!"

Irrepressible admiration! And everything knocked to pieces by it! I could have choked that sailor with my own fingers. Up went Samuel J. Oakes, straight into the air, with a string of language that would have disqualified him from ever addressing another Sunday school if it had been generally known.

"The little idiot! The damned fat young fool! The—"

Well, it agreed with my worst opinions of his son perfectly.

"And I suppose he's married that half-breed—"

"Whaddya mean—a half-breed?" That talkative young sailorman did manage then to remember that we were trying to keep Oakes away from his son's wedding. "Who said he's going to marry her, anyhow?" he added.

"Yeah!" howled Oakes. "When does this wedding take place, anyhow?"

"Next week!" I yelled back the lie before that idiotic gob should spill the last thing he knew.

"Thank the Lord we're in time to prevent that much!" Oakes breathed fervently. "Come on, captain—stick up your flag and run right in. Bobby wouldn't dare fire on the Stars and Stripes."

And just then the sun went down.

"To-morrow morning, Mr. Oakes," the captain responded promptly. "I'm not worried much over your boy's orders myself. But I wouldn't take a ship into that harbor at night on a bet of her entire valuation."

I nearly dropped dead. All done—as easily as that. And Donohue decided to turn back and lie off the leeward side of the island. The volcano had blown itself out for the time being. The regular trade wind would be blowing in before morning. I got back far enough to have the fort's hill protect me.

"Come back at half past eight to-

morrow," I had bidden Donohue in parting. It would take him over an hour to creep into that bay with a sounding line going at every turn of his propellers.

"Be back at six," was his retort.

But even that would leave me only an hour and a half of real holding him to do so. I turned into my washed-out bunk for the first sleep I'd had in longer than I could remember.

"Here they come," yelled the gob on watch when it seemed to me I had barely dozed. All our timepieces were out of commission, but the sun was hardly fifteen minutes clear of the horizon.

Every bone in me ached. I felt about three times as tired as when I had lain down. I looked dizzily around the room, with my head aching harder than anything else. And there, right on my big chest, stood a bottle of rum.

Yes, that is one of the times I forgot about that pledge business. After all, taking a pledge is a sign of weakness. I took a drink; then I took another; a third seemed about to reach the spot, and I took a fourth.

I don't know where that rum came from yet. I suspect that Bobby, or some of the boys, had brought it in from the city, and the cook had found it and thought it possible that I might need a little. I certainly felt better.

"No, you don't!" I had courage to yell up at Donohue's bow, having gingerly backed my ship right into his course.

"Push it out of the way—I'm chartering it, and will pay for the damages," snapped Oakes.

Donohue slowed down and then kept on coming. His bow barely touched the side of the Typhoon, but it stayed touching. I heard him give the telegraph a jerk from the bridge. The Morro Castle began to push us.

Naturally we swerved slowly around. I was saying things to Donohue, and Donohue was saying them back to me.

"Come on, cap—we don't stand for no such treatment as that!"

It was Johnny Sweeny. It was the whole mixed crew. His words chimed beautifully with the ringing bells in my ears.

"Come on—board her," I yelled to the crew as we began to rub down the Morro Castle's starboard side, reaching the low waist deck, hardly above our own.

The boys that were left of my crew and the twenty-six gobs waited for no second invitation. And we all had guns. A lot of us had guns that would never shoot again—but we didn't tell anybody on the Morro Castle that.

"What in the devil are you trying now?" shrieked Oakes, as I got my rusty weapon pointed at his face. "This is plain piracy."

"That's what it is," roared Donohue. "I'll have you hanged for this. Plain piracy! You'll see what you'll get!"

And I realized that it was, and that I probably would.

But it was too late to stop then. With two gobs, one on either side, I went up the bridge. I worked the telegraph to and fro a moment, then set it at "full speed astern."

There was some comfort in thinking that I wasn't likely to get any worse than hung. Then I saw that I was to have troubles even at that. Nobody had stayed on the Typhoon at all. She was drifting. She was drifting where she couldn't drift in any direction without drifting onto rocks.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE INTERRUPTED WEDDING.

BUT eternal vigilance had to be the price of keeping that ship put, until

I thought to give order to drop an anchor. I saw to it that the anchor was given plenty of chain. It is fairly easy to drop an anchor. Getting one up again isn't so easy. I figured I could hold the Morro Castle now.

About all of our boys settled down on the forward deck. The crew of the vessel had generally made tracks for the fore-castle and the engine room. Of course there might have been some scattered attempt to pot us with such pistols as some of them might have had aboard. It would hardly have been worth their while. Captain Donohue stayed in the chart room

under me, with Oakes and his mate and chief engineer. They were holding a futile council of war.

Only enough of it reached my ears to sound pleasant and restful. I had had just about half a night's rest in three nights. I grew sleepy.

Some of the boys were growing sleepy, too. But enough of them looked wakeful to me to warn of anything that might get started. Of course I'm at the bottom of the pit of despair; but that is the place where a man stops worrying over worse to come. I dozed.

In an instant I was awakened by a yell from forward. I thought the whole crew of the Morro Castle was coming at us in armed force. But I saw no crew except my own. They were jumping to their feet and rushing to the rail.

And there it went—a twenty-foot motor lifeboat—heading up the harbor at not less than sixteen miles an hour. I yelled at the boys to shoot; then yelled at them not to shoot.

I did my own shooting—down the stairs to the chart room. I looked at the chronometer before I looked at Captain Donohue. The captain was grinning; but the chronometer had a regular laugh on me. It said ten minutes past seven.

An hour would take that motor boat into San Comosellama City. Samuel J. Oakes was aboard that motor boat.

For a moment I felt that dizzy sensation one gets when the whole world seems to have gone wrong. I must have turned clear around myself. Then I saw something. I was out of that chart room more quickly than I had got into it.

"Come on, boys—there's another motor tender," I yelled.

Well, we didn't upset it. We managed to keep it from taking the water exactly end on. Presently we got it going. Forty of us in a twenty-five-foot boat! It went—like a snail.

And then I thought of something else. I didn't have to turn two points out of a straight course for the big dock. I got to the old Typhoon, and left everybody there but Sandy and Ryan, and told them to get her off safe. Then we went faster.

We were gaining on them. They hadn't more than a mile ahead of us. They were aiming for a smaller pier, perhaps afraid that the destroyer might somehow cut up as strangely as the San Comosellaman navy.

But I kept straight for the big pier. Steadily we gained. Sandy thought we would beat them. I was sure we would not do worse than a tie. They had six men aboard. We were but three—and one of those was Sandy Macay.

At what we guessed roughly to be half the distance we must make we had eaten up more than half the mile of their start. Sandy managed to worry the motor into about four more revolutions per minute.

We gained faster. We drew abreast the other. We passed her. We were but a quarter of a mile from the big pier when we did it. In three more minutes we were on it. We were all on it before Samuel J. Oakes made the first of his crew to leap the other wharf.

And then—Clangity bang! Crash! Whizz! Ding-dong! Boom—boom—boom! Rip! Roar!

"What the devil?" gasped Ryan.

"Not the devil at all," Sandy reminded him. "It's the cathedral. But—it can't be time for the wedding."

That depends. Bobby was pulling off that wedding. Could it be possible that he would upset the last tradition the poor old place had, and do something early?

"Say, what are we going to do now, anyhow?" Sandy inquired, as we approached the street end of the pier at a run.

"Stop them," I wheezed back at him. "Come on."

But what were we going to do? From the sound of that church's bells it must be three or four blocks to the west of our favorite main street up the hill. That other pier was three blocks west of the long one. And Samuel J. Oakes had two of those blocks the start of us.

Once more we gained on Samuel J. Oakes. Ryan couldn't have been half a block behind him, and Sandy was right at Ryan's heels when Oakes hit the crowd outside the big church. Perhaps the crowd thought our American manners were im-

proving some; we were not quite so rough to them as we had been to the last wedding crowd when we had attended.

But Samuel J. Oakes didn't spend much time on getting through the throng. We three dived right in after him. And then all four of us dived right into the church.

The racket we made in there, where things were pretty quiet in spite of the row outside the eight-foot walls of the place, it was bound to interrupt. The bishop was just taking Dolores hand. He stopped dead and stared at the intruders. Belito, standing right behind Dolores, turned and stared. Bobby turned and stared.

"It's dad!" I could see his lips say it. And they went white. And Dolores looked around.

Right then Samuel J. Oakes sat down. He looked whiter than Bobby. I thought his heart had failed from his run. Several others thought so. They hurried toward him, while things at the altar waited.

"Stand aside," Oakes panted in a thick whisper. "I want to see if she's real."

They understood his gesture; he had a way with him that indicated that he was used to obedience. Again the bishop could stare at him while he stared at the bride. Bobby was following the bishop's example. Dolores suddenly smiled.

"Go on—go on, boy!" the old man rasped out thickly. "If you've got her to think she wants you, take her quick."

Would that take the wind out of your sails? Could you beat it, after all we've been through? Do you wonder I'm a wreck? The whole story just ended up in ten little words! It was like Bobby.

And night hadn't reached before Belito and Bobby's father had everything fixed up between them and were as thick together as twin brothers. They had another election, and Belito was back in his place for life. Don Jaime didn't seem to raise much noise on his second visit to the States. He couldn't connect with another Samuel J. Oakes.

Just plumb fizzled out, that's what the whole thing did. All but my end of it—and the rest of the Typhoon's crew. It looked pretty dark for us—until—

Oh, well, I might as well admit that one

reason why I'm tired of the sea and thinking of settling down on a nice little farm, and wishing I hadn't aged too much for the Widow Brown—and wondering, sometimes, whether I really have at that—is the twenty-five thousand Belito gave me for some of the things Bobby claimed I'd done for him. They bought the Typhoon direct. She's still San Comosellama's navy.

And that chap who said history was a lie agreed upon—he had the right idea. If one always knew the things that don't get printed or reported to the men higher up—he wouldn't need to know most of the things they do print. A man might be able to understand history a little then.

There's my case. It is recorded in black and white that I had to put into San Comosellama's creek for repairs, was caught and rescued in the last eruption of Monte Negro, and am still a first rate mariner!

There's that cruiser's captain. It is said in the reports that he rescued a yacht off San Comosellama property of the *presidente*—name, Typhoon. That's all.

The destroyer had run in for shelter. Six of her men were hurt during the storm. Porcoso's bullets or machetes—nothing said about it.

Samuel J. Oakes has decided that his son is a great business man. Just see how nicely he worked it for the Independent Sugar Company to get control of the San Comosellama supply.

Oh, yes, history is a lie agreed upon, all right. But making the real stuff is mighty hard on the nerves. If I do take a rest from everything but a winter trip now and then to visit Bobby and Dolores down there at their father's *hacienda* where they intend to spend the cold months usually—I'll have it coming to me.

(The end.)

B U D D I E S

H O! H o! Ole whiney! Try a smile—

Altho' the night be dark a while

The morrow may be fine.

Away with gloom! Hold braver thought!

The girl you loved—the men you fought.

Courage is soul wine.

Death and danger stalk together,

On the mountain top and heather,

From Alaska to the Nile.

Cold! and the bottomless crevasse—

Hot! and the poisonous morass—

Hissing coils and crocodile.

Face monster, loss, and want of food

With iron grin—a grimmer mood:

Then, Bud O'Mine!

Thorn path or rose, howe'er the sky—

We'll link together—you and I.

My fate—to thine.

J. Halpin O'Reilly.

A Hundred Thousand in Gold

by Lyon Mearson



THE leaden sky that hung overhead in unrelieved gloom was not more heavy than the heart of Gerald Whittingham, of the Mounted, as he trudged in through the drifted snow to the small trading post of Blackhorse Peak. Over and over the refrain beat its sinister way through his consciousness, hammered at his whirling senses:

"Alice Patterson is a forger! Alice Patterson is a forger!"

It formed a kind of a bleak little song, its rhythmic cadence pounding through his soul:

"Alice Patterson is a forger! Arrest your love, she is a forger!"

With a snarl of impatience he cast the refrain out of his consciousness and continued on his way. His clear eyes clouded as, over the last ridge, he caught sight of the few houses of Blackhorse Peak. There was that ahead of him there that he dreaded to face, yet he knew he must face it as a gentleman of the Mounted should, with an eye single to his duty and with a complete forgetfulness of self.

Months before, in midsummer, there had come to Blackhorse Peak a girl. The story was that she had come in search of health, and Widow MacNeil, who already had one boarder on the same quest—a man by the name of Lawrence Smilax—took her in.

It is probable, however, that the gods had not sent her there for her health. She was sent to break the young heart of Whittingham of the Mounted, which is a way the gods have of making a strong man stronger and older and harder.

Gerald Whittingham had not been long in the service; he was still young enough to be susceptible to a pretty face, and he could still thrill to the lights that glow far down in the depths of night-black eyes. He was still, owing to his recent enlistment, far more human than most men of the Mounted. After a while he would lose it—this humanness. Then he would become a law-enforcing machine.

To say that Gerald Whittingham lost his heart to Alice Patterson would be to put it mildly, indeed. He could lose more than his heart—he could just as easily lose his immortal soul while he gazed dizzily into her eyes; and he could count it well lost.

As for Alice Patterson, she was a beautiful woman; there is no use in denying that. She was small, and her slightness gave her a girlish appearance that not many women can take along with them after they leave high school. Her hair was deep black—not the dead black of the Indian—but a live black, a shimmering black that spoke of smoldering flame within its

piled-up masses. Her eyes were black, too, with tiny pinpoints of light gleaming far down like twin candles in the velvet blackness of a cave. Her voice was music incarnate, and her laugh—well, if there were not more men's hearts eternally broken from listening to that laugh, it probably was simply because there were no more men in the neighborhood.

It had seemed to be a close race between Whittingham and Smilax, the stranger who lived under the same roof with her, but of late it had begun to look rather surprisingly like Whittingham; that is, he realized he had a chance, which is a great deal to have, he reflected, when you think what a girl Alice was, and how impossible it seemed for any male to be worthy of her.

Yesterday Lieutenant Hogan had come into the squad room with a picture in his hand. Only Whittingham was there when, he entered.

"Whittingham," he said, "here's a picture of a woman wanted for forgery. I understand she is hiding somewhere in your territory. Do you know her?"

Languidly the young man took the photograph and examined it. The color seeped from his face suddenly, leaving him pale and nerveless. The pasteboard trembled in his hand.

"What's that—ah—what the bally hell did you—I beg your pardon, lieutenant," he said finally. "Did you say she was wanted for forgery?"

"Yes. Know her?"

"Her face is familiar—think I can probably pick her up," said Whittingham nonchalantly. "Want her?"

The lieutenant nodded.

II.

THAT is how it came to pass that Whittingham, of the Mounted, traveled to Blackhorse Peak to arrest the woman he loved more than his life. It was all a mistake, of course, and she would be able to straighten out things—anybody with half an eye, he reflected, could see she was the whitest and straightest person on earth—and the most beautiful, of course. But he would have to arrest her anyway, and she

would have to do her straightening at headquarters.

Really, you know, one ought not to be called upon to do such things to the woman one loves, he thought. Deucedly embarrassing; liable to lead to anything, don't y' know. Quarrel, tears, parting forever—oh, any one of a number of fairly horrible things. Why, one time in Bloomsbury, there was a girl—but what was the use of thinking about London now? One had stern things to accomplish here.

Alice herself opened the door to admit him, late that evening, at the Widow MacNeil's. She saw at once that something was wrong. There was a look in his eyes that she had seen in the face of dumb things that had been hurt—a wounded deer, once, and once a dog that had been kicked by its master.

"Why, Jerry!" she cried, her own eyes widening. "What's up?"

He said nothing, but came in, and she followed him, through the little entrance foyer into the living room, where a great fire flickered in the rude fireplace. In the middle of the floor he turned to her.

"Alice, there's a hard thing I have to do—you'll understand how hard it is. Of course, it is probably all a mistake, but—"

"Why, Jerry Whittingham, what on earth are you talking about?" she interrupted. "Are you going—"

"Alice," he intoned slowly, "what was your name before it suddenly became Patterson?"

"Before it became Patterson?" she asked, and he thought the color was leaving her fine face. "Why, what do you mean—"

"I mean," he said brusquely to hide his emotion, "was it by any chance Sander-son?" He looked her directly in the eye, and under his steady, searching eyes her gaze finally wavered. At last, without a word, she gave a little sigh and dropped into a chair, covering her face with her two hands. Her shoulders shook in a sob.

All the self-possession he had gave way like a broken dike engulfed by a tidal wave, and in an instant he was on his knees at her side.

"What is it, Alice?" he implored. "Tell

me about it." I'm a brute to come to you like this," he said helplessly. "But, you see, I thought it had better be me." He put his arm around her and held her close until she had regained a measure of her calmness and could talk coherently.

"It's the truth," she nodded. "My name is Alice Sanderson—I never thought they would be able to trace me, away out here. Oh, Jerry, Jerry—it was just a thoughtless, schoolgirl crime; I was only a child—I didn't know what I was doing." She sobbed unrestrainedly again.

"There, there," he soothed. "It 'll all come out all right."

"Jerry, you won't—won't—let them take me to jail, will you?" She lifted up her tear-stained eyes to plead piteously with him. "You won't, will you, Jerry?"

"Certainly you won't go to jail, dear." His jaw squared, and his keen eyes hardened. "It 'll be all right, honey—I'll just take you to Broken River, and the lieutenant in charge will fix it up; it must be a mistake."

"Oh, no, no!" she sobbed again. "Don't take me there—they'll never understand. I'll go to jail if you take me there. Oh, Jerry, what shall I do?" She sobbed in his arms again. His face was paler than hers by now.

"But I must, Alice," he said slowly. "You know, a member of the Mounted—"

"You're not a member of the Mounted to me," she interrupted, looking at him with her glorious eyes again. "You're Jerry, just plain Jerry—the man I love—you must protect me. Jerry, you *can't* take me there!"

"There is no way out, Alice," he said quietly. "I must take you."

"No, no! Not that!" she implored. "Come with me, Jerry. We can reach the border in a week—once over the line, we can hide ourselves in the States—we'll change our names, and we'll work to live down the past—just you and I, Jerry. My husband to be! Jerry!"

Her arms were lifted up to him appealingly, and his heart was as ice within him. He had wanted her to say yes to his suit, but now that she had said it, it was like Dead Sea fruit in his mouth, ashes and

dust. This was something he could not do. Young as he was in the force, yet his training was against this.

He straightened his back and looked away from her. It was dangerous to gaze into those liquid eyes—when he did so he had a sensation as if he was falling over a cliff—down—down—down.

"No, not like that, Alice. I'm sorry," he said as calmly as he could.

"Don't judge me too harshly, Jerry dear. I know I committed a crime—but, Jerry, I was only a child—I didn't know. And how I've repented since! Is your love strong enough to overlook my one little schoolgirl slip? Is it—"

"Of course, honey," he said soothingly. "Of course. I understand. I don't care what you've done." He took her into his arms. "I don't care—"

"Then do what I ask of you, Jerry. Take me to the States with you—we'll begin life anew. Jerry, I'll be a good wife to you. I'll—"

He was looking into her eyes again, and he was falling. All that life contained for him that was worth while he held in his two arms, and it was a hideous trick of fate that he should be called upon to open his arms and deliver her to the law—the law, which he was sworn to uphold.

And yet, did any earthly thing have the right to come between them? She was even yet but a child. Could there be any one so blind as not to see there was no harm in her—that she was not a criminal? She was just a little girl who should be gently spanked and put to bed by her mother. He drew his gaze away from hers with a wrench.

He shook his head slowly, with an effort. "I don't see how—"

She cut him off with a tiny hand over his lips, and began to sob softly, brokenheartedly, on his shoulder.

III.

It was much later that evening when Gerald Whittingham, of the Mounted, left to seek his bed at the trader's house. There would be no point in going over the rest of the scene with Alice. It is enough to say

that his heart melted within him; it was more than a young man should be called on to bear. When he left, he had not actually promised to start for the border with her in the morning, but he had not promised not to, either. And the impression she received was that the border was the direction in which they would travel.

You must not be too hard on Jerry. After all, he was not much more than a boy himself. And then again, he had been in the Mounted only a few months.

This is no plea for Whittingham; it is simply an explanation. And Alice was wonderful!

Jerry's head whirled as he left to trudge his way, on snowshoes, to the trader's cabin. The cold night air revived him a bit and enabled him to see things more clearly. Every star seemed an accusing eye that searched into his very soul; the sighing of the light night wind was an accusing voice.

He was a Mounted policeman who was shirking his duty. It had never happened before—and they said it would *never* happen. And yet it would—he was going to do it. The honor of the most splendid organization in the world was in the hollow of his palm, he reflected, and he was about to open his palm and let it drop into the mud.

He paused for a few moments on the trader's doorstep. The black night enveloped him with her generous mantle, and the snow was pale in the starlight. From afar there came to him the howling of a wolf. From another direction there came answering howls.

Even a wolf stays by its own kind, reflected Jerry. And he was a member of the Mounted. It came to him with sudden, sickening emphasis, that he could not go through with this. Much as he loved Alice—and he would cheerfully have laid down his life for her—yet this was a thing no man should do. His jaw hardened and his blue eyes narrowed to pinpoints of flame.

"I can't do it, y' know," he murmured to himself. "It's not sporting." He squared his shoulders.

It was settled. He would do his duty.

It was as simple as that—you just made up your mind to do your duty, and you did it. That's all. There is no alternative to a man's doing his duty.

He turned from the trader's doorstep, although he had already bent down to loosen his snowshoes. In an instant, strengthened by his resolution, he was on his way back to the Widow MacNeil's. He could not let Alice wait until morning, believing that he would cross the border with her. He must tell her to-night that it was impossible.

He traveled swiftly now; he felt that he would not weaken; but it was well to do a thing of this nature quickly. Alice would perhaps be in bed by now, but she would come down if he called.

At the door of the MacNeil house he took off his snowshoes and left them outside. The door was not locked, and he pushed it open and went in, silent as death in his moccasined feet. He entered the little foyer and looked toward the living room. His eye lighted as he saw the top of Alice's head over the back of a chair that faced the flames. He opened his mouth to speak, but noticed she was not alone. Some one was in the other chair. He advanced to the door, but her slow, languid voice halted him. She was talking to the other man.

"So I got this young fool of a policeman to agree to take me over the border," she was saying. Jerry stiffened, and his eyes took on a terrible expression. Like a statue he stood, speechless, silent, grim.

"First time I ever heard of a Mounted man pulling stuff like that," drawled the voice of the other man. It was Smilax.

"I vamped the poor fool," she was saying, and her laugh rippled out. "I told him I'd marry him—"

"Yes, I know all that, my dear," said Smilax, "but where do I come in on this arrangement. You go away with this policeman and—"

"Oh, can't you see?" she cut in with exasperation. "I have to go away with him—I need him to get me over the border. Once over, I can fling him aside like that!" She made a gesture with her left hand as of flinging scraps into a wastebasket.

"I'm through with him, see? He won't be able to put up a howl because he'll be a criminal himself. They'll be wanting him worse than they do me."

"And me—"

"You can trail along about half a day after us. I'll shake him at Fort Benton, and that's where you come in. We'll lose ourselves in the States—you can get yourself a job, and we'll be as happy—"

"Job, nothing," he broke in, laughing. "Did you ever hear of the Jarvis National Bank of Montreal robbery?"

She looked at him questioningly.

"Hundred thousand dollars—in gold, it cost them. I did it."

"You?" she breathed. "You got all that money? Where is it?"

He laughed. "Well, I don't mind tellin' you," he answered, "now that I'm sure of you. Y'see, kid, I never could be certain before that you wouldn't spill the beans—an' then where'd I be? It's a funny thing about that gold. I made up my mind that even if they pinched me they'd never find the hundred thousand—that would be waitin' for me when I got out. You'll never guess where it is."

He paused a moment to note the effect. She was gazing at him, entranced.

"Do you know that deserted little shack on the Platte, five miles or so from here—you know, over on that abandoned road. The—"

"The haunted house?" she put in.

"That's the one—where old Simpkins was bumped off. Y' know the gang around here—neither whites nor Indians—can be got within five hundred yards of the place. Well, that's the place. Double flooring, under the bunk. That's all—simple, ain't it? It 'll stay there until I take it out. With that money, kid, the two of us will be sittin' pretty."

"Can you get it any time?" she asked.

"Sure thing. Why?"

"Well, I was thinking that you could get it in the morning and travel along behind us, so when you hit the States you'll have something to go on."

"That's a rather pretty idea," said a cold voice behind them. "We'll all go and get it in the morning."

They whirled at the sound. "Put up your hands and make it snappy, too!" growled Whittingham of the Mounted.

His icy voice lashed through the air like the snap of a whip. "Sit down!" he ordered. They sat down.

He turned on Alice. "I didn't come back here to listen, Miss Alice Patterson Sanderson," he said calmly. "I came back to tell you that I would have to take you in to Broken River in the morning." He laughed shortly, terribly.

"I heard most of what you had to say, though. It's not done, y'know—this business of wrecking a man's life and then throwing him aside—why, you ought to know it's not as easy as that." He waved his blue automatic expressively, his eyes hard and the lines tight around his lips. His face seemed older, somehow.

Alice sat in her chair, her eyes gleaming defiantly. "I don't care if you did hear." She tossed her head. "You fool! Did you think I could care for you?" She looked back into the flames, lost in her thoughts. Smilax, big and bearded, was saying nothing.

Whittingham stepped forward and patted his pockets. He relieved the bearded man of a revolver, which he tossed on the table out of his reach.

"You can put your hands down, Smilax," he said. "I hope your chairs are comfortable, because you're going to sleep in them for the rest of the night. At dawn we start. I'll stay here until we do. And I advise you not to try anything on—either of you," he warned ominously.

IV.

A SQUAT, lonely cabin nestled under a bank at the side of a neglected road that had long fallen into disuse. In the early morning light it looked like a tattered tramp among houses, a pariah among human habitations, showing up a faded brown against the clear white of the encircling snow. To the door of this shack came three wayfarers, two walking in front of the third. One of the two in front was a woman, now and then pushing back a rebellious lock of her deep-black hair.

"Go in," said Whittingham, "and mind, no tricks."

Smilax pushed open the door and they went in, followed closely by the policeman. He looked around him as he entered, and found it to be an unlovely place, the interior consisting of two broken chairs, a wobbly, dust-covered table, a broken-down bunk in one corner of the room, and on the table a saucepan covered with red rust. The floor was of rough wood, but the shack itself was not weathertight. The sky showed through the chinks in the roof and the snow had sifted in through the cracks between the logs. All this Whittingham noted at an all-inclusive glance.

"My good man"—he turned to Smilax—"I'll trouble you to dig up that money."

"Dig it up yourself, damn you!" growled the bearded one.

"I said I wanted you to get it," repeated Whittingham in a voice of cold, tempered steel. He took out his automatic. "And do it quickly, like a good fellow. I would, if I were you." He added this significantly.

Smilax, after a moment's hesitation, bent down and began to rip up the rotten flooring under the bunk. In a few moments he had a good sized cavity exposed to view. He thrust in his hand and drew forth a small, heavy bag, which he threw down on the floor beside him. It clinked pleasantly. He drew out another, and another, and another, until there were fifteen in all.

He picked them up from the floor, in a sullen silence, and placed them on the rickety table, which sagged under their weight. Each bag was heavy—far heavier than it looked.

"I say, are all those bags really full of gold?" asked Whittingham, bending over them, his automatic in his right hand.

"Well, rather," said Smilax. "Wait—I'll show you." He bent over one of the bags to open it.

Whittingham could hardly explain how it happened, because it was over so quickly. In the large, muscular hand of Smilax one of the heavy bags was flicked up, swift as light, crashing against Whittingham's jaw. He clattered down upon the floor, the automatic flying from his hand. Even as he went down his brain cleared, and he saw

Smilax stooping for his gun. He lunged for it, too, but neither had a chance of getting the weapon.

Like a rapier flashing through the air came the sharp voice of Alice:

"Put 'em up, Smilax—and keep 'em there!" He turned to look at her.

Her own blue automatic, which she had drawn miraculously from nowhere, was leveled at him steadily.

"What's this—a joke?" he stammered, advancing toward her.

"Stop where you are, I say, or I'll jolly well show you whether it's a joke or not," she snapped. He stopped in his tracks.

"I say—" he began again.

"Shut up!" she whipped out like a lash.

"Tell it to the judge."

She turned to Whittingham, who had now regained his feet and was looking at her as though fascinated, not knowing what to say or do. For once he was at a loss.

"Put the bracelets on him, Jerry," she said. Mechanically he did so.

"There, I guess he won't be any bother now." She smiled at Whittingham. "Will you take the prisoner?" she requested, putting down her gun. He nodded.

"Now, if you'll kindly explain how you—" he began, a little stiffly.

"Of course," she smiled brightly. "There's one coming to you, and you'll get it in good time. In the meantime—" She fumbled on the inside of her fur robe, and when she brought out her hand a small bronze badge lay in her palm. He bent over it and choked back an exclamation which sounded suspiciously like "I'll be damned!"

There was an emblazoned crown, and under it the words, "Secret Service."

V.

"You see, Whittingham," said Lieutenant Hogan, "Miss Patterson had tracked him from Montreal. She knew he was the thief, but she also knew his plans. He intended to keep the money hidden, so that if he was caught the gold would not be seized, too. Then, after his term, he would come out, dig up the hundred thousand, and live happy ever after.

"She stayed with him for months, always getting deeper and deeper into his confidence, but he never relaxed enough to tell where the money was hidden—and, of course, she could hardly ask about it. And, of course, they were just as keen to recover the money as to arrest him—in fact, the bank was keener on the money. Don't mind telling you there's a ten-thousand-dollar reward out on it—and I suppose you're entitled to some of it.

"Anyway, she had no luck in getting the information from him. She came to me and we cooked up this scheme—you know, about her being a forger. The idea was that he would loosen up as soon as he perceived that she was a crook, too, and was willing to escape to the States and marry him. By this time, as I suppose I don't have to tell you, he was rather crazy about her. That's about all, except that maybe we owe you an apology for using you like that. You see, we thought it would make it more realistic if you knew nothing about it, because she intended you should arrest her in the house—and she knew that Smilax was in the habit of listening to every word that was said there. Of course, he heard your little interview with her—it worked fine. Some actress, isn't she?"

"Actress!" He smiled ruefully, did Whittingham of the Mounted, but said no more for the moment.

"Well," said the lieutenant, rising from his desk, "guess I'll have my feed." At the door he turned. "You know, she was considered one of the most capable operators in the Service."

"Was?" echoed Whittingham. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Why, she's leaving the Service, you know. Getting married." He went out, leaving Whittingham to thoughts that were not of the pleasantest.

It was humiliating, to say the least, he reflected, as he sat there. To be used as a stalking horse—and by a woman. So she was simply playing with him; she needed him here, so she pretended to be in love with him. Now she was through—and she was to be married. A stab of jealousy shot through him.

The door opened and he looked up.

Framed in the doorway was Alice Patterson, more radiant and beautiful than ever. She was smiling. He rose stubbornly to his feet.

"I suppose you've come to tell me how sorry you are that you had to use me," he said, his voice hard, but his gaze averted. He knew the danger of looking into those eyes.

"Not at all," she smiled. "I intend to use you for a good long time, you must know."

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked for the second time in that room that day. She looked at him in silence.

"Oh, nothing," she said lightly. "You know, there's half of the reward coming to you—"

"Nonsense," he said. "I had nothing to do with—"

"Don't be absurd and stiff-necked, Jerry Whittingham. What's the difference who gets it, you or I? I know a beautiful little cottage that can be bought for—" He was looking at her queerly by now, but beginning to understand. He took a step forward.

"Alice, then you weren't joking when you said you would marry me?" His eyes gleamed brightly and he would have taken her in his arms had she not evaded him. "But the lieutenant said you were going to be married."

"So I am," she told him confidently, "if I can only get the man to propose. I'm waiting—" But she could say no more for the very obvious reason that he was kissing her on the mouth.

"You poor, stupid dear old Jerry," she said at last when he released her. "I was beginning to think I'd have to propose to you. Why, I never saw such a dumb man—"

"Would you have proposed to me if I hadn't, honey?" he grinned.

She smiled. "You know, on account of my last job, I consider that in a way I'm connected with the Mounted. And you know the motto of the Mounted, don't you?" He looked at her questioningly.

She smiled softly.

"The motto of the Mounted," she said, "is '*Get Your Man.*'"

LINDY'S LOVER

NO, ma'am, Miss Nell, Ah couldn't come las' week—you got ma note?
'Caze Ah did have a awful spell of ulsters in ma froat.
Ma Lindy she were worried, 'caze it made me pow'ful weak,
But dis ol' niggah bob aroun' as long as she can speak.
De doctah say Ah must eat vitermines to do me good,
But Ah like cookin' which is plain-an' not no fancy food.

Ah don't know did Ah tole you Lindy's singin' in de choir,
Her voice jus' lak a medder lahk, but sweeter yet an' higher;
Tra la, tra la la, up an' down jus lak a runnin' brook,
De man what plays de orgum gives her lessons fum a book.
Well, on las' Thursday night our church was crowded to de do',
We'se got a new young minister who cum fum Baltimo',
So we had a reception wiv' ice cream an' eberyting,
An' after all de speechyfyin', Lindy stahts to sing.
De minister were laughin' an a sittin' in a pew
Wiv dat big dressy alto, name of Icilene Bellew;
She knowed him in de summeh time, for Baltimo's de town
Whar she spent her las' vacation wiv her sister, Mrs. Brown.
When she found he comin' to dis church she thought she could pretend,
So she tole most eberybody dat she's his lady friend.

But when he heard ma Lindy sing, an' saw her pretty face,
He jus' sat dere an' stared an' stared—it sholy was a case
Ob lub at fust sight. When she stops he hurries up to meet
Her an' to say "That song, it suttinly was sweet."
He brought refreshments an' a chair, an' treat her lak a queen,
An bofe of dem dey clean forgot all 'bout dat Icilene!
Oh, she were mad—she looked lak she could eat em up alive;
She were sweeter fust dan honey—now she'd sour de whole hive.
Well, to make de story short, de preacher brung ma Lindy home,
An' ever since he callin' up on dat ol' telefome.
Den after choir practice he a waitin' for her, too,
An' walked her off befo' de eyes of Icilene Bellew.
Las' night dey came home lak two turkle doves, an' dat's de trufe,
But Icilene say he's engaged to her—she's got de proof!

He say she lyin'—dat as true as shines de stars above,
She tried to do de courtin', but he never made no love;
Ah wish ma Lindy no mo' lovers if dey all deceive,
But ebery word de preacher says she sholy does believe,
An' he's a mighty fine young man, Miss Nell, so now you see
Ah don't know what to do when he comes axin' her fum me!

Ray H. Gross.

Common Folks

by *Gordon Stiles*



WHEN Edith Merton and Eben Sanford were married, Fillmore said it was a perfect match. Fillmore has a way of passing upon the wisdom or folly of whatever steps may be taken by any of her sixteen hundred inhabitants. And her judgment comes pretty near being final. You are right or you are wrong. If you are right, Fillmore is a pleasant town to live in. If you are wrong, it is very disagreeable. But since both Edith and Eben were right, and always had been, they had nothing to worry about.

Edith was the daughter of Miles Merton, foreman at Squire Willett's sawmill. Eben was an orphan who had been brought up by his uncle, Francis Sanford. The latter, up to the time of his death, had been town clerk and highly respected by his neighbors. Eben was right-hand man to Alvin Miller, proprietor of the general store, and did everything, from unpacking cases to distributing their contents at various kitchen doors about Fillmore. This last was accomplished with the aid of a rattly express wagon having a driver's seat so out of plumb that its occupants always looked deformed.

There was no aristocracy in Fillmore, unless it was Squire Willett, whose wife kept two servants and had a sister in Buffalo. Mrs. Willett tried to draw a social line when she formed a literary club and opened its rolls to a chosen few, but the thing died

during the first warm spell. After that matters gradually returned to normal, and the town got along without culture. So young Mr. and Mrs. Sanford enjoyed as good a social position as Fillmore offered, and their marriage was considered a particularly happy one.

Eben's stipend of twenty-four dollars a week was looked upon in Fillmore as "good pay." This conclusion was not so far-fetched when it is considered that, at the time, a comfortable story-and-a-half house could be rented for sixteen dollars a month. Edith did her own housework, and found that ten dollars a week, at the outside, sufficed for provisions. That left a clear ten dollars for clothing and amusement.

The last item was covered by infrequent trips to the neighboring city of Elton, where the maximum price of theater tickets was one dollar. Anyway, Edith so managed that, at the end of the first year, the Sanfords owed no money and their bank account was enhanced by a little more than a hundred dollars, bringing their total cash assets up to eight hundred dollars.

Their anniversary was celebrated by a trip to New York, the first either of them had made. It was a breathless week for Edith. The journey from Albany on the boat, the bewilderment of New York street traffic, the subways and elevated lines, the astounding department stores, the Battery,

the zoo, the Statue of Liberty, Coney Island, and, most of all, the fairy lights of Broadway—all these gripped her imagination mightily. And the result of it all was that Edith returned to Fillmore a hopeless victim of Newyorkitis. Eben, too, was thrilled—as a boy is thrilled by a circus, happy over what he has seen, and looking forward to next year.

With Edith it was different. To her practical mind, waiting for next year was not enough. There was New York, city of wonders, two hundred miles away. And millions of people lived in the midst of those wonders, could taste them at will. Why, then, should not she and Eben become a part of those millions? Surely, Eben could make his way as well as the others. He was twenty-eight, she was twenty-four. It was ridiculous to think of wasting their lives in a dead town like Fillmore.

She broached the matter to Eben, who was somewhat startled at the idea. Leaving Fillmore for good was not on his list of possibilities. To be sure, there was no reason why he should not do it; it just hadn't occurred to him. But Edith's enthusiasm was contagious, and her husband became an easy convert.

Of course, there were protracted discussions, pro and con. Eben's inborn conservatism had to be dealt with, to which process he contributed probably as much as did Edith. But the latter was full of confidence in her husband's ability to overcome any existing difficulties.

"I'm not sure that I can find a job in New York," Eben said.

"Of course you can. Isn't it done by hundreds of others every day? You know you're as smart as they are."

"Well, I'll try. Tell you what I'll do. I'll write to some of the people we buy from, and tell them about my experience here. Perhaps I can get a line on something that way. But I'd have to have a lot more money. Living is high down there."

"Other people live there. I guess we can do what they can."

"Are you sure you would like it, Edith? I mean for a steady diet. We don't know

a single soul there. Wouldn't you be lonesome?"

"Eben, I'd rather live there than any place in the world. And, as for friends, we can find plenty when we've been there a while. We will be together, anyway. And think of all the things we could find to do, even by ourselves."

"All right. I'll see what I can do. And I guess I'd like it as much as you would. Everything depends on the kind of job I get. There isn't much chance here. Old man Miller told me the other day that those chain-store people in Elton were trying to buy him out, and even if he does give up I wouldn't have much chance to get the business with those people bidding against me. They have plenty of cash, and I would have to borrow almost everything. We'll have a try at this New York game. I'll get busy right away."

II.

FINDING the necessary opening proved surprisingly easy for Eben. A letter to the wholesale grocery house with which old man Miller had dealt for many years brought a favorable reply. In the end, Eben made a two-day visit to New York, and when he came home announced to an excited Edith that he had been engaged by the shipping department of Stone, Munson & Co., at a salary of thirty-five dollars a week to start. To both of them the amount sounded stupendous.

It was a great evening for the Sanfords. Also for all Fillmore. The news that Eben was going to New York and into a fine position spread with the rapidity peculiar to small towns, and the post-office was the scene of a tremendous number of conjectures, both as to Eben's future and as to his probable successor. The job in Miller's store took on a new value, turning out, as it had, a stepping-stone to greater things. Eben bore his honors with outward modesty, albeit he was fiercely exultant under the surface.

Edith Merton made no effort to conceal her satisfaction, and was brimming over with chatter about her plans. To her, the two weeks which was the length of no-

tice Eben had given old man Miller dragged interminably.

Finally the great day arrived, and, waving good-by to half of Fillmore, the Sanfords were borne cityward. Their furniture was stored snugly in the loft of the Merton barn. It was securely crated, ready for shipment to New York when Edith had selected an apartment. In the mean while they would find a good boarding-house. The thirty-five a week seemed as big as ever.

The train rolled into the Grand Central early of an August evening, and the travelers went directly to the hotel at which they had stopped on their previous visit. They went through the motions of eating dinner, but both were too excited to do the meal justice. There was nothing to unpack. Their trunks were at the station, pending the selection of a boarding-house, so that soon after the first electric blazed against the sky Edith had hooked her arm through Sanford's and drawn him into the swirl of Broadway.

The evening was one of unalloyed delight for both of them. There was the ice-cream soda at the crystal fountain with its marvelous lights and the big, noiseless fans above, swinging in their wide arcs, their gentle breeze ruffling the paper napkins and gay streamers that seemed to be everywhere. There was the hour spent in a motion-picture house big enough to swallow up the entire population of Fillmore three times over. And best of all, the long stroll up Broadway to Central Park amid thousands of animated beings, all laughing and talking and hurrying; the clang of the surface cars, the discordant tooting of motor horns, the rumble of subway trains under foot—all a part of, yet engulfed by, the eternal, mighty roar that is the voice of the city.

Edith was long in falling asleep that night. For hours after Eben had dozed off in the middle of a sentence she lay in blissful ecstasy, thinking of what had come to pass. She, Edith Sanford, was a New Yorker. This wonderful place was her home. It was no dream; it was true. She was here, and she would be here in the morning, and the next morning, and all the

days and weeks and months and years after that.

She could see her mother calling at the Fillmore post-office for the mail, and her own letters, with the magic postmark, New York City, upon them. And her mother and her friends posting letters to her and addressing them to New York City. She wished the night would pass so that she might begin her search for a boarding-house, and wondered what she would find and what it would be like. Of course they wouldn't really be settled in New York until they had their own home—an apartment in New York City—their home, cozy and snug, and Eben coming home to dinner, and the evenings, and the picture-shows, and— Edith was asleep.

The next day was Saturday. Eben was to take up his new duties on Monday. Thus there were two clear days in which to establish themselves somewhere. At breakfast they pored over the board-and-lodging advertisements. The assortment was bewildering. They knew nothing of localities; but they marked the more promising items, and set out soon after nine o'clock.

It was a weary day. Everywhere the terms seemed outrageous and the landladies uncompromising. But they persevered, moving farther and farther up-town, until it came about that, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the Sanford family, baggage and all, became the occupants of a third-floor-front on Lenox Avenue, near One Hundred and Twenty-Fourth Street. The cost, including meals, was twenty dollars a week. That was high, according to Fillmore standards, but of course it was only a temporary business.

Mrs. Sprague, the landlady, conducted her boarding-house along time-honored lines. She was a widow whose age was somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty, but who clung to youth with frantic fervor. She had ruined a pleasant softness of feature by dyeing her hair an uncompromising black. This was supposed to have been done because of the presence in the house of a boarder whom she referred to as "the puffessor." What he was professor of nobody appeared to know, but he

wore a frock coat and delivered weighty opinions at table. The hair-dyeing occurred soon after the professor had taken Mrs. Sprague to a revue one evening. The balance of the company was ordinary enough, but everything was new to Edith. She enjoyed even the bill of fare. So much for the Sanfords' first abode in New York.

Monday morning brought its responsibilities to Edith as well as Eben. When she had kissed him good-by and seen him swing around the corner to the subway she turned with enthusiasm to the task of home-hunting. In this she gladly accepted the proffered aid of Mrs. Janney, who, with her husband, lived at Mrs. Sprague's. That lady knew little of prices, but her knowledge of localities saved Edith much time. The day was tiring and not altogether satisfactory, and when Edith returned to the house, just in time to greet Eben, she had grown dubious about her mental determination not to pay more than thirty dollars a month, even though all this occurred before the great war.

Eben was in high spirits over his new job. The work was not hard, and his associates seemed a pleasant lot of fellows. He listened to Edith's report, and planned to go with her next evening to inspect such possibilities as she could find. They spent the evening writing letters to relatives and friends in Fillmore.

Two weeks later it came about that they settled themselves in a four-room apartment on West One Hundred and Sixty-Third Street, near Amsterdam Avenue. The rent was forty dollars a month, and the cost of moving their furniture from Fillmore, together with the purchase of rugs and other things incidental to the installation process, made it necessary to draw more money from the bank, reducing their reserve to a little more than five hundred dollars. Thus they started life in New York. They were young and teeming with enthusiasm for the city they had adopted as their permanent home.

III.

TEN months after Eben entered the employ of Stone, Munson & Co., he was given

two weeks vacation. It was decided that Edith should precede him to Fillmore by two weeks, thus giving her a month with her family. It was their first separation of more than a day or two, and to each it seemed a momentous proceeding. Eben was sober and Edith tearful when they parted at the Grand Central.

Eben went home to the little flat and pottered about aimlessly. He glanced through the evening paper, then went into the street, where he wandered about to no definite purpose. His steps turned involuntarily toward the river. When he reached Riverside Drive he seated himself on a vacant bench, and watched the red sun dropping beyond the Palisades. He thought of Edith. She would be watching that same sun from the car window. She must be nearing Poughkeepsie now. Tomorrow night she would see the sun go down behind Miller's Hill.

Thoughts of Fillmore—more thoughts of the little town than he had given it in months—came tumbling through his mind. The unpaved main street, with its surface of finely powdered dust; he had never seen dust so white in any other place. He could smell it now as it was kicked up by the farmers' buggies when they drove in to make their weekly purchases at Miller's store.

He felt something like a wave of affection for those farmers, with their knotted hands, their battered hats, and frayed overcoats, gone green with age, donned at the first chill of autumn. They seemed always to be working, putting things into the ground and taking things out of the ground. He never had realized before how much he admired them for the gamblers that they were. They gambled with rain and sun, with heat and cold, with the ever changing market prices; every little detail of their lives was a gamble. And Eben wondered how it was that the impression they had made upon him had been one of simplicity and conservatism.

Edith would be walking along in that white dust to-morrow. Coming to the post-office, she would cross the new iron bridge below the dam. That was the bridge over which there had been such a fight in town

meeting. The older voters favored building a wooden structure, but the young men had insisted upon iron, and won out. Eben used to fish from that bridge. He could hear the pleasant roar of the dam and see the foaming water collecting itself, as it were, after its disconcerting tumble.

A year ago he had been working in Miller's store. It was amazing to recollect how settled he had considered himself. Why, Elton, only twenty miles away, had been pretty well on the rim of his horizon then. And here he was, a part and parcel of an entirely new life, as different from the old as anything could be. Of course he was better off, he thought mechanically, and stopped. *Was* he better off? He began to take stock of the situation.

His salary stood where it was when he entered the employ of Stone, Munson & Co., thirty-five dollars a week—eleven dollars more than he had received from old man Miller. But more than half of the extra money was eaten up by increased rent. Then there were the items of lunches and car fare. Right there Eben realized with a start that, after these expenditures were deducted, he and Edith actually were trying to live on less money in New York than they had in Fillmore.

Beyond that was the partial depletion of the savings-bank account. There had been clothes to buy, and saving for the purpose from week to week had proved too slow a process. So they had determined to draw on the reserve and replace the amount as they could. But, somehow, not a penny had found its way into the bank, and the eight hundred dollars of less than a year ago had dwindled to half that sum. So much for the monetary end of the business.

Just what were the compensations New York had to offer? There had been the excitements attendant upon their explorations into city life. Everything had been so new and thrilling, but it came over Eben with a rush that the thrill had passed months ago. No longer were the letters to the home folks filled with descriptions of strange sights and experiences. The novelty was gone. The things so full of interest in the beginning were commonplace,

every-day matters now. The bright lights, the Fifth Avenue crowds, the Sunday parade on Riverside, the museums, the zoo, Central Park, subways, Coney Island, picture houses—everything had failed of special attraction at once. Without Edith, Eben felt himself high and dry on the rock of boredom. If it had not been for her, the last months would have been immeasurably awful. It was only now that he knew it.

He looked idly at the river craft and the stern face of the Palisades. It was nice, he thought—very pretty. But was it as satisfying as the woody slopes and smiling meadows of Fillmore? And the smell of ripening fruit?

Here he was assailed by the fumes of gasoline and the never ceasing roar of hundreds of motors; couldn't get away from it, either; they were everywhere. If only he were with Edith. He shuddered at the thought of the empty flat. He didn't want to go back there; he didn't want to see a picture show alone.

Where could he go? They had friends. There were the Davises and the Clarks and the Lockwoods, young married people whom they had met and seen more or less of. Davis was in the cashier's department at the office, and his weekly envelope was fatter than Eben's by fifteen dollars. They had spent some pleasant evenings together. Same with the Clarks and the Lockwoods. Curious, though, thought Eben in review, that the program invariably had been dinners somewhere, theater, and a bite of supper in a Broadway restaurant. Why was it, when you dropped into somebody's home in New York, that the first subject of conversation was what "to do"? Why must people always "do something"?

He felt depressed. And he knew it was not due entirely to the absence of Edith. It was the realization that he did not like New York. That and the knowledge that he must remain there. He felt snared, tied, bound, lashed to something he suddenly had come to loathe. He could not tell his wife about it. She loved the city so much. She must not know that what would make her husband happiest would be to step back into his old job in Miller's store, where every customer was a friend and every little

transaction was more of a personal affair than one of business.

It was not that he was discouraged about his future. He knew that as the years passed he would earn more and more. But what would it mean? A better apartment, more spending money, better clothes, perhaps a motor-car, wealthier associates—he could not think of them as friends. Of course he couldn't expect Edith to look at it that way. No. He would go on and make the best of everything, and find his happiness in that of Edith.

During the two weeks that followed Eben read Edith's letters hungrily. They were full of bits of gossip which really were trivial, but which Eben devoured with an eagerness that surprised him. He wondered if it were just homesickness that had turned him so suddenly against New York and caused Fillmore to blossom like paradise in his mind. His own letters breathed keen anticipation. Edith and Fillmore—those were all he thought about as the intervening days dragged themselves out.

IV.

EBEN drew a long, happy breath when he stepped off the train into the embrace of an ecstatic Edith. As he held her crushed in his arms he became dimly aware that other people were there, too. In a moment he was the center of a group of scores of his old Fillmore friends, all crowding forward to shake his hand and speak a word of greeting. Their beaming faces showed their sincerity. Eben expanded under it all and became the personification of heartiness. Finally Edith bore him off to the Merton home.

The two weeks passed as a happy dream. There were the long walks together over familiar paths, the fishing excursions with their dainty picnic lunches, the nightly chatter at the post-office, the porch gatherings. Eben pottered about in Miller's store, sometimes helping out in a rush, "just for the fun of it." The townspeople seemed to regard him as a person of importance, which was flattering to Eben even if he didn't quite understand it. His successor in the store plied him with questions, all

of which pointed to a desire on the part of the questioner to become a part of the larger life that was Eben's. The latter tried to be enthusiastic, but even as he talked the thought of leaving Fillmore turned him cold. But there was Edith. She would never be happy outside of New York.

One night he said: "Edith, does this make you like New York more or less?"

"Of course I enjoy being here, but I shall be so glad to get back," she answered. "Won't you?"

"I guess yes," said Eben. The effort at apparent sincerity was entirely successful. There the subject dropped.

Again New York; again the morning and evening subway journeys, the daily routine, the rasp of the dumbwaiter buzzer in the middle of dinner, the clumping of garbage cans, the smell of cabbage or fish cooking next door, the rumble of trucks and the din of vari-noted motor horns. All of these grated more and more on Eben. But there was Edith and her happy smile. Eben kicked himself and decided that nothing else mattered.

The months wore away. One day was much like another. During that second winter there were only a few outstanding occurrences. Eben announced one day that his pay had been increased five dollars a week. They gave themselves a little dinner in a fine restaurant and saw the latest Broadway hit—all in honor of the event. But prices had gone up, and the five dollars did not make as much difference as they had reckoned; it just paid for some of the things they had felt bound to do without before.

About Christmas time a letter from Edith's mother told of the death of Mr. Merton's sister, Edith's Aunt Lettie.

"I haven't seen her for years," she told Eben. "She lived in Vermont, and came to see father only about once in five years. I am sorry, though, because she was a sweet old lady, and she seemed to like me. Mother says that dad has such a bad cold that he can't go to the funeral."

On New Year's Eve Mr. and Mrs. Davis gave a party. There was punch and dancing, and when the Sanfords reached home

in the early morning hours both were in high spirits. They told each other over and over what a wonderful evening it had been. Eben felt that New York was not so bad, after all. Both were glad of the opportunity of sleeping late which the holiday afforded, however.

It was just after the Davis party that Eben thought he detected a change in his wife. At first he attributed it to nervousness. She developed a quickness of movement and fluttered over what she happened to be doing. It seemed to him that her color had heightened. When they were alone in the evening she sometimes would dart over to his chair, bundle herself into his arms, and give him little, nervous hugs.

"You do love me more than anything in the world, don't you, Eben dear?" she would say. "There isn't a thing you wouldn't do to make me happy, is there?"

"You know that your happiness is all that counts with me," Eben would say. Once he asked: "Aren't you happy now?"

"I'm so happy it hurts," she told him and smothered him with kisses.

Indeed, it looked to be the case. Gradually the nervousness Eben had remarked grew less, but there was an extravagance in Edith's enthusiasm over life in general that astonished Eben. He never had seen her so light-hearted. That was what kept up his own spirits—that and the newsy letters from Fillmore. He absorbed eagerly the tiniest word from the town.

In one letter Mrs. Merton wrote: "You remember the Redfield place wasn't occupied last summer. Well, it has been sold to a New York lawyer, Chester Hoyt, and he is fixing it all over. He seems like a nice man, and has been up here twice already."

Eben was suddenly filled with an unreasonable resentment against Chester Hoyt, a man he had never seen. Who was he that he should be able to live in Fillmore and in the finest house in the place? When the Redfields, also of New York, had built their summer home, Eben had looked upon it as the ultimate of any man's desire. He was awed by a person who could spend fifteen thousand dollars on a twelve-room house just to live three months a year in.

April came, frivolous with sun and rain and the days that set dancing the blood of the normal human being. The spirits of both husband and wife partook of the season, but with a difference, so it appeared to Eben. For Edith radiated contentment and seemed to gain the keenest joy from their every-day life. With Eben it was a constant fight against the longing for Fillmore—Fillmore and the smell of melting snow and the slush-covered streets and the black loam of the new-plowed fields.

A letter came to tell Edith that her mother was ailing. Eben was surprised when his wife suggested that she go home for a few days until her mother should improve. It was not unusual for Mrs. Merton to be under the weather. Eben suspected that Edith felt somehow that the trouble was more serious this time, so he acquiesced willingly. Edith wrote him that the patient was doing nicely, and herself returned at the end of five days. She had much to talk about. Mr. Hoyt had been in Fillmore and had shown her over the remodeled house. It was wonderful, she told Eben, and again he was stirred by an envious resentment.

"Do you really want to spend this year's vacation in Fillmore?" Edith asked.

"Why, yes; I think it would be nice," replied Eben, trying not to appear over eager. "Did you want to go somewhere else?"

"Of course not. But I wanted to be sure that you wouldn't find it too dull. Do you think June would be too early to go?"

"Any time that suits you suits me. Why so early?"

"Well, it's a lovely month there, you know; and the wild strawberries will be ripe. You like 'em, don't you?"

Eben had a fierce inward struggle over those wild strawberries. The fragrance of them, all sun-ripened. "All right. I'll speak to Mr. Munson about it," he said.

Mr. Munson was agreeable, and it came about that on a mid-June evening the Sanfords once more were on a train bound for Fillmore. Eben had put aside every thought except of the two weeks before them. He felt, too, that the trip would do Edith a

lot of good. She appeared more nervous than he ever had seen her. Nervous, but happy.

She was full of plans for the coming fortnight, and had taken along much more clothing than on her last summer's holiday. Perhaps her mother would want her to stay a little longer. She reminded Eben of an affectionate kitten, nestling against him in the Pullman seat and patting his hand furtively as they were whirled through the twilight.

V.

"FILLMORE!" called the brakeman, and the train came to a grinding stop. Only two or three spectators stared as the Sanfords, with their various pieces of baggage, appeared on the platform.

"I wrote mother not to tell anybody we were coming to-day," whispered Edith. "I didn't want a crowd down." She looked about nervously.

Before Eben could say anything, Billy Wicks, Eben's successor at the store, came striding up.

"Good morning, Mr. Sanford," he said, with a quick glance at Edith. "Better let me take hold of some of that stuff. Here, Mrs. Sanford, let me have that suit-case. It looks heavy."

"Hello, Billy," said Eben. "Going to give us a lift? That's fine. Much obliged."

Billy was half-way across the platform, one hand clutching Edith's suit-case and the other dragging a trunk. Eben caught up to him as he was stowing his burdens in the tonneau of a shining, new touring car, parked on the other side of the station.

"Well, well. What's all this?" inquired Eben. "Old man Miller been branching out and buying a car?"

Billy grinned. "Nice one, ain't it? There's room in there for Mrs. Sanford, and you can sit up front with me."

It was not until they had settled themselves in the car that Eben realized that Edith hadn't said a word since they alighted from the train. He swung around and looked at her.

"Why, Edith, what's the matter? You look frightened."

Edith did look frightened. The color was coming and going in her face, and her eyes implored as she leaned forward, steadying herself in the moving car, and whispered: "You said you'd do anything in the world for me, didn't you? Well, then, don't ask me any questions—yet."

So Eben sat, puzzled, and stared at his wife.

Young Wicks was concentrated on the road ahead. Eben noted that for some reason he was avoiding the main street.

"I say," announced Eben over his shoulder, "here is the Redfield place. That Hoyt certainly has fixed it up fine. Look at that drive."

Even as he spoke, the car swung about and rolled easily up that same drive. It stopped with a certain finality abreast of the newly painted porch. With the setting of the brakes, Eben turned to Wicks.

"What's the big idea, Billy? What did you come in here for?"

Billy looked at him out of the corner of his eye. Apparently he was waiting for something. Then came the voice of Edith. "Get out, Billy. For goodness' sake." Billy got out and walked hastily across the lawn. You could tell by the back of his head that he was grinning.

Eben heard the click of the tonneau door. Edith said: "Please get out, Eben." He did so, and they stood together on the broad stone step. Billy had disappeared. The next moment Eben's arms were full of a laughing and crying Edith—an Edith who was trying to say something and finding it difficult.

She took hold of his lapels and turned her face up to his. "Oh, Eben dear, you will forgive me, won't you? It was horrid of me. Don't you see, it's all ours—our house and our car. And I've got the store. I know you love New York, and I'm mean and selfish. But I couldn't bear it there, and I thought—I almost told you a hundred times—but I thought—oh, I couldn't bear it there any more—and I knew you loved me enough—and—and—"

Eben drew her down to the step and sat beside her. "Now, tell me all about it so that I can understand."

"Well, you see," she began, "when

Aunt Lettie died she left me most all of her money. A letter came to me from a lawyer about it. I started to call you up at the office. But then I thought about it. I knew you were crazy about New York, but I knew that I would just die if I had to stay there. I knew that two months after we went there. And then I thought if I could take the money—it was almost thirty-five thousand dollars—and get us a nice house and buy Mr. Miller's store, perhaps you would live here to please me—because you love me, and you said—”

But she was in Eben's arms again, and he was telling her all the things that had been tormenting him for months, and how the thing didn't seem real. And she was telling him how real it was, and how she had engaged Chester Hoyt, whose name she picked at random out of the telephone book, to buy the house and the store and keep it in his name and a secret until now. And then Billy came back and unloaded the baggage, and they drove to where old

man Miller stood smiling under a new, gilt-lettered sign that read “Eben Sanford.”

The crowd that Edith had feared at the station was there, twofold. And they were all laughing and excited and thumped Eben on the back until it was sore. And Eben hugged his mother-in-law right in front of everybody, and old man Miller declared it was time he retired, and that he'd rather have Eben in the store than a stranger. It was an hour before they drove back again to their new home.

Eben was silent on that drive. So was Edith. They were too happy to talk. As they drove up once more beside the porch Eben shook his head.

“To think,” he said, “that this was what both of us wanted all the time, and each thought the other didn't. What ever made you think of it—to do it this way, I mean?”

“Oh, lots of things,” Edith said. “And besides, I want my babies to be raised in the country.”



OBSESSION

SMITH'S home is but a stopping-place,

His office is a jest;

He has no time for any one,

He doesn't even rest;

He talks both night and morning

Of brassies, putters, cleeks,

Of farways and of fairways,

And the bunkers and the creeks,

His friends no longer see him;

His children and his wife

Are worried to distraction

At the way he lives his life;

He listens to their pleading,

Then he simply gives a shrug;

He just can't understand at all—

Smith is a golfing-bug.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

How I Increased My Salary More Than 300%

By JOSEPH ANDERSON

I AM just the average man—twenty-eight years old, with a wife and a three-year-old youngster. I left school when I was fourteen. My parents didn't want me to do it, but I thought I knew more than they did.

I can see my father now, standing before me, pleading, threatening, coaxing me to keep on with my schooling. With tears in his eyes he told me how he had been a failure all his life because of lack of education—how the untrained man is always forced to work for a small salary—how he had hoped, yes, and prayed, that I would be a more successful man than he was.

But no! My mind was made up. I had been offered a job at \$9 a week and I was going to take it.

That nine dollars looked awfully big to me. I didn't realize then, nor for years afterward, that I was being paid only for the work of my hands. My brain didn't count.

THEN one day, glancing through a magazine, I came across the story of a man just like myself. He, too, had left school when he was fourteen years of age, and had worked for years at a small salary. But he was ambitious. He decided that he would get out of the rut by training himself to become expert in some line of work.

So he got in touch with the International Correspondence Schools at Scranton and started to study in his spare time at home. It was the turn in the road for him—the beginning of his success.

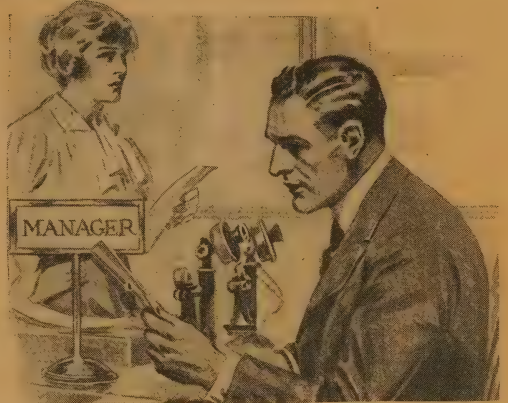
Most stories like that tell of the presidents of great institutions who are earning \$25,000 and \$50,000 a year. Those stories frighten me. I don't think I could ever earn that much. But this story told of a man who, through spare-time study, lifted himself from \$25 to \$75 a week. It made an impression on me because it talked in terms I could understand. It seemed reasonable to suppose that I could do as well.

I tell you it didn't take me long that time to mark and send in that familiar coupon. Information regarding the Course I had marked came back by return mail. I found it wasn't too late to make up the education I had denied myself as a boy.

I was surprised to find out how fascinating a home-study course could be. The I. C. S. worked with me every hour I had to spare. I felt myself growing. I knew there was a bigger job waiting for me somewhere.

Four months after I enrolled my employer came to me and told me that he always gave preference to men who studied their jobs—and that my next salary envelope would show how much he thought of the improvement in my work.

Today, my salary is more than 300% greater than it was when I began my studies. That increase has meant a better home and all the luxuries that make life worth while.



What I have done, you can do. For I am just an average man. I had no more education to begin with than you have—perhaps not as much. The only difference is a matter of training and a resolve to be like Lincoln, who said—"I will study and get ready and some time my chance will come."

TO every man who is earning less than \$75 a week, I say simply this:—*Find out what the I. C. S. can do for you!*

It will take only a minute of your time to mark and mail the coupon. But that one simple act may change your whole life.

If I hadn't taken that first step four years ago I wouldn't be writing this message to you today! No, and I wouldn't be earning anywhere near \$75 a week, either!

----- TEAR OUT HERE -----

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2134-C SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

- ☐ ELEC. ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting & Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENGR.
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy

- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Show Card & Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer & Typist
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
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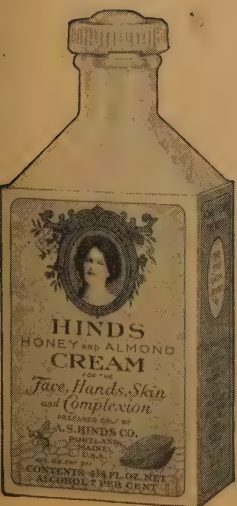
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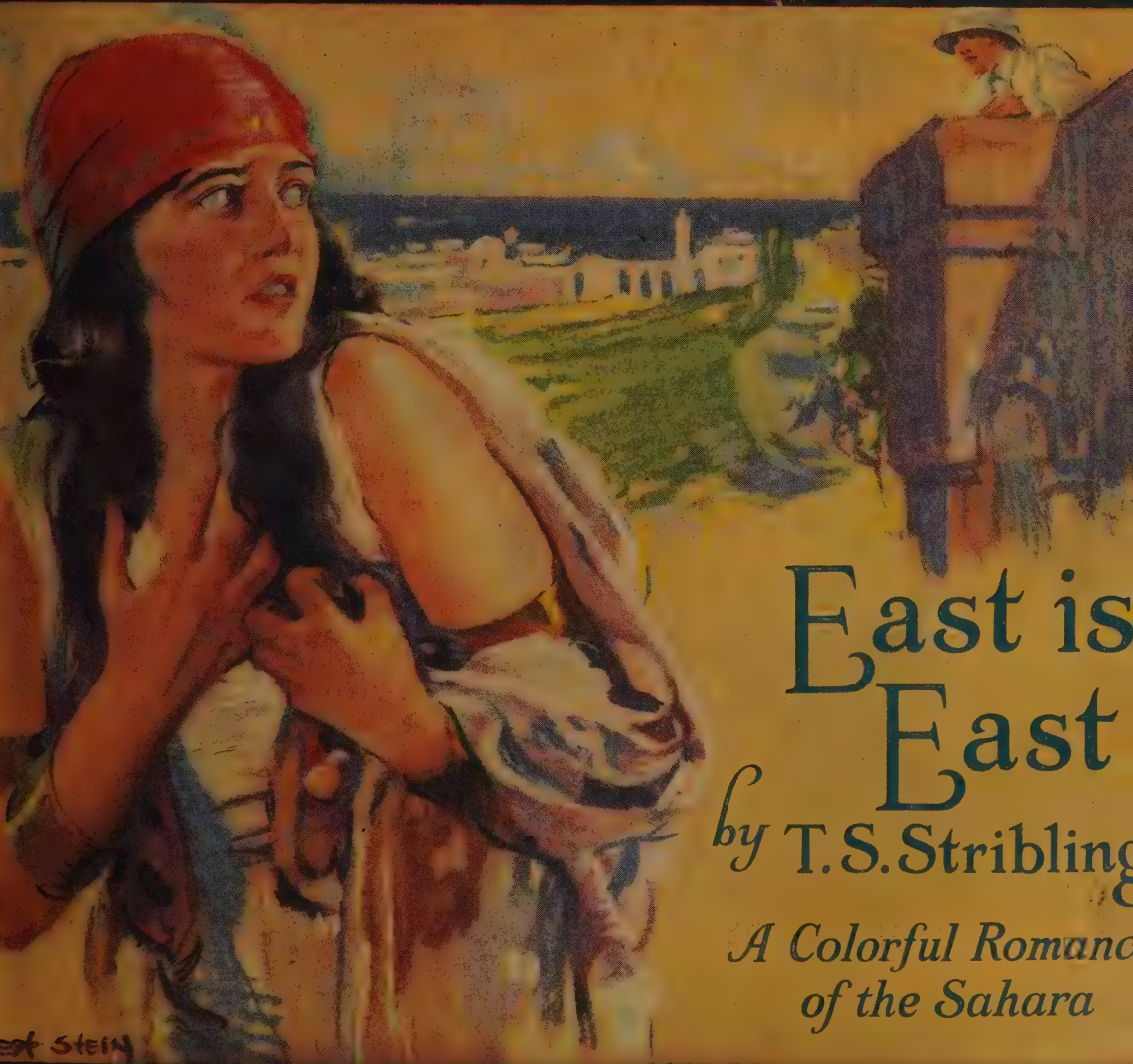
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLII

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NUMBER 2

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WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music and guarantee to secure publication on a royalty basis by a New York music publisher. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Composing Studios, 238-B Fitzgerald Building, New York.

WRITE A SONG POEM. You can do it. Write about Love, Mother, Home, Childhood, Comic, or any subject, and send words today. I compose music and guarantee publication. **Edward Trent, 652 Reaper Block, Chicago.**

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Walworth, St. Louis, Mo.

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$5—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP.,** 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

Good Farm Lands! Near hustling city in Michigan. 20, 40, 80 acre tracts \$15 to \$35 per acre. Terms to meet your circumstances. Write today for FREE booklet, giving full information. **SWIGART LAND CO.,** Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago.

BOOKS

ANY BOOK YOU WANT AT CUT-RATE PRICES. Don't buy until you see our bargain list. Send postal for free copy. Write now. **MID-WEST BOOK HOUSE,** 58 West Washington Street, Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

\$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular \$25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make \$35.00 to \$40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. **SPENCER MEAD COMPANY,** Dept. D-204, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. **E. PALMER,** 500 Wooster, O.

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—\$75.00 to \$150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. **A. B. Aldridge, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.**

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.**

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. **Acme Letter Co.,** 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. **Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.**

Inventor Startles Motorists; mechanical marvel prevents blurred windshields; one swipe keeps entire windshield clear 24 hours; railways same; sells \$1; fits pocket; year's guarantee; Clarke sold 61 two hours. **Security Mfg. Co.,** Dept. 612, Toledo, Ohio.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. **Lacassian Co.,** Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubbs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. **Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.**

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. **Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.**

AGENTS—"VARNI-LAC" is the most wonderful seller. Puts a whole new car on an old automobile for \$2.00. Exclusive territory. Send 80 cents for \$2.00 can. **REPUBLIC PRODUCTS COMPANY, Prospect Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.**

HELP WANTED

MAKE MONEY AT HOME. You can earn from \$1 to \$2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. **American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.**

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RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. **CBS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.**

\$133 MONTH COMMENCE! Government Railway Mail Clerks. Men—boys over 17. Steady. Common education sufficient. List positions free. Write immediately. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE, Dept. D-1, Rochester, N. Y.**

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! \$110 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

Firemen, Brakemen, Baggage-men, Electric Motormen, Conductors, Sleeping Car and Train Porters (colored). Railroads everywhere \$140—\$200. **836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.**

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. **Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.**

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. **Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.**

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. **Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.**

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The Only School in the U. S. teaching all branches of Painting. Short practical courses in commercial art, sign painting, scenic painting, poster art, window trimming, showcard writing, decorating, paperhanging, auto painting. Home study and resident courses. Cat. free. **Chicago Painting School, 162 W. Austin Ave., Chicago.**

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

The Letter That Saved Bob Johnson's Job

—and paved the way for a better one!

BOB answered the summons to the Chief's office with just a little fear and trembling, for a lot of men were being dropped—a lot more were having their pay reduced.

But as Bob came in, his employer did a surprising thing. He got up quickly from his desk and grasped Bob warmly by the hand.

"I have just received a letter from the International Correspondence Schools telling me that 'Robert Johnson of your office has enrolled for a course of home study and has received a mark of 94 for his first lesson.'

"I want to congratulate you, young man, on your industry and good judgment. I am glad to see that you are training yourself not only for your present job but for the job ahead.

"We're cutting the pay-roll. Until I received this letter, I had you in mind as one of the men to be dropped. But not now. Keep on studying—keep your eyes open—and pretty soon there'll be a still better job for you around here. We're always looking for trained men."

WON'T you let the I. C. S. help you, too? Won't you trade a few hours of your spare time for a good job, a good salary and the comforts that go with it?

It takes but a moment to mark the career of your choice, sign your name, clip out and mail the coupon printed on the right. Yet that simple act has started more than two million men and women toward success.

In city, town and country all over the world, men are living contented lives in happy, prosperous homes—because they clipped this coupon.

In every line of business and industry; in shops, stores, offices, factories, in mines and on railroads, men are holding important positions and receiving splendid salaries—because they clipped this coupon.

Clerks have become sales, advertising and business managers; mechanics have become foremen, superintendents and engineers; carpenters have

become architects and contractors; men and boys have risen from nothing to places of responsibility—because they clipped this coupon.

You have seen it in almost every magazine you have looked at for years. And while you have been passing it by more than ten thousand men and women each month have been making it the first stepping stone to real success in life.

Will you still turn away from Opportunity? Can you still go on, putting in your days at the same grind, getting the same pay envelope with the same insufficient sum, when such a little thing can be the means of changing your whole life?

You can have the position you want in the work you like best, a salary that will give you and your family the home, the comforts, the little luxuries you would like them to have. No matter what your age, your education, or your means—you can do it.

All we ask is the chance to prove it. Just mark and mail the coupon, and, without obligation or a penny of cost, let us tell you what the I. C. S. can do for you. It's a little thing that takes but a moment, but it's the most important thing you can do today. Do it now!

----- TEAR OUT HERE -----
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2135-C SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting & Railways | <input type="checkbox"/> SALESMANSHIP |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> BOOKKEEPER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenographer & Typist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Public Accountant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R | <input type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC MANAGER |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STATIONARY ENGINEER | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accountant |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> PLUMBING & HEATING | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation |
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Name.....

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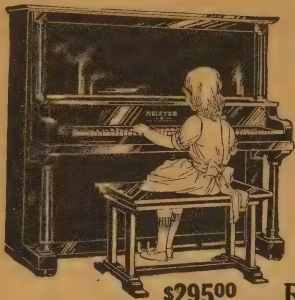
City..... State.....

Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

We Will Place This Piano in Your Home on Thirty Days Free Trial

FREIGHT PREPAID



\$295⁰⁰

We want you to *try* it and satisfy yourself as to its excellence before buying it. Then if you like it, you may buy it on small monthly payments as low as \$8.00.

No interest on monthly payments
No cash deposit required
No extras of any kind
Stool free with the piano
Eight smart styles to choose from

\$295

Only one profit to pay. We are the makers and we sell direct to you. Write today for our **FREE CATALOG** showing piano and piano-players in their natural colors.

ROTHSCHILD & CO., Dept. B-1, Chicago

KENNEBEC CANOES

Light
Staunch
and Safe.
Beautifully
finished and
perfectly bal-
anced; quick to
respond to paddle

"SAFEST
TO USE"

You
can have
our 1922
illustrated
catalog free
showing canoes
and boats that
will meet the
most discrimi-
nating tastes.
Best Quality—
Low Prices



Kennebec Boat & Canoe Co.
15 — R. SO. WATERSVILLE, ME.

Auto Owners WANTED!



To introduce the best auto-
mobile tires in the world.
Made under our new and ex-
clusive **Internal Hydraulic**
Expansion Process that elim-
inates **Blow-Out—Stone-Bruise**
—**Rim-Cut** and enables us to
sell our tires under a

**10,000 MILE
GUARANTEE**

We want an agent in every
community to use and in-
troduce these wonderful
tires at our astonishingly

low prices to all motor car owners.

Write for booklet fully describing this new
process and explaining our amazing in-
troductory offer to owner agents.

Hydro-United Tire Co.
Dept. 204, Chicago, San Francisco, Pottstown, Pa.

SEX KNOWLEDGE

Prevents the sorrows and tears caused by ignorance
and adds much to individual and married
happiness.



"Where Knowledge Means Happiness"
is a book that tells simply and
clearly vital facts

Every Man and Woman should know
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Sent postpaid for \$1. Cash, stamps,
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Dept. 104, KNOWLEDGE BOOK CO.
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EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make \$15 to \$60 weekly in your spare time
writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting.
We instruct you by our new simple Directograph sys-
tem, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady
work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained
men win high positions and big suc-
cess in business and public life.
Greater opportunities now than ever
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\$3,000 to \$10,000 Annually
We guide you step by step. You can train
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"Evidence" books FREE. Send for them—NOW.
LaSalle Extension University, Dep. 432-1A Chicago, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

WANTED—MISCELLANEOUS

MAIL OLD GOLD. unused postage, war and thrift stamps,
Liberty Bonds, silver, platinum, diamonds, jewelry, watches,
false teeth, magneto points, etc., new or broken. Cash im-
mediately. Held ten days, returned if unsatisfactory. Ohio
Smelting Co., 254 Lennox Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

CASH PAID. MAIL US YOUR DISCARDED JEWELRY.
Gold Crowns and Bridges, Watches, Diamonds, Silver, Platinum,
War Saving Stamps and Old False Teeth. Highest prices paid.
Money sent by return mail. Packages held 4 to 12 days and
returned at our expense if our offer is refused. United States
Smelting Works (The Old Reliable), Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.



\$6,000.00 YEAR WITH THIS MACHINE

What others have done, you can do! **\$6,000.00** year is low estimate. Many make more. This new machine and Haywood's Tire Surgery does the trick. Starts you in paying business quickly. No experience needed.

Many Men Making Money

Are you drifting back to lower wages? Protect yourself. Beam on these money makers! Hargan, of Ill., did **\$20,000.00** last year. Fetzer Bros., Pa., made profit of **\$3,500.00** first year. Spring City Tire Co., Wis., did about **\$50,000.00** last year. Ramsay, S. D., working alone, cleared **\$441.56** in one month. Wendt, Ind., approximates **\$500.00** month. Tucker, Ill., high as **\$127.00** weekly, single handed. Mitchell, Ill., says "Record day was **\$360.00**." And so on!

Get My Big Proposition

Start like others have done. Get the facts. **There's nothing to stop you. I'll help you to the limit.** My proposition is highly interesting. Send coupon or postal to me, personally. Write me tonight.

Mr. M. Haywood, Pres.,
Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.,
826 Capital Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

Dear Sir—I am interested in Tire Surgery. Please tell me all about this profitable business and your modern equipment.

Name _____

Address _____

Factory to Rider

Saves \$10 to \$25 on the **Ranger Bicycle** you select. You can have your choice of **44 Styles**, colors and sizes. Delivered free on approval, *express prepaid*, for **30 DAYS' FREE TRIAL**.

12 Months to Pay if desired. Possession and use at once on our liberal year to pay plan. Best quality, at factory prices, *express prepaid*.

Tires Lamps, wheels and equipment, low prices. Send **No Money**, to business direct with makers.

Mead Cycle Company
Dept. B-30, Chicago

Write today for free Ranger Catalog, factory prices and marvelous easy payment terms



DEAFNESS IS MISERY



I know because I was Deaf and had **Head Noises** for over 30 years. My Invisible Antiseptic Ear Drums restored my hearing and stopped Head Noises, and will do it for you. They are Tiny Megaphones. Cannot be seen when worn. Effective when deafness is caused by Catarrh or by Perforated, Partially or Wholly Destroyed Natural Drums. Easy to put in, easy to take out. Are "Unseen Comforts." Inexpensive. Write for Booklet and my sworn statement of how I recovered my hearing.

A. O. LEONARD

Suite 89, 70 5th Avenue, - - New York City



He Starts at \$5,200 a Year

One hundred dollars a week!—And only a few years ago his weekly wage was less than \$30. Didn't dream he could do it when he first took up the study of Higher Accounting under the LaSalle Problem Method; but he just couldn't *help* getting ahead—so he wrote—because he found it the most interesting thing he ever tackled.

Knew nothing about bookkeeping, but LaSalle quickly gave him the necessary foundation. Then, step by step, he was trained in the practical work of Cost Accounting, Auditing, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance, Income Tax Procedure—not theoretically, mind you, but by the solving of actual problems lifted bodily from business life. As a result, he sits as Auditor at a big mahogany desk and commands a salary of \$5,200 a year.

His Chance is Yours!

Typical, this man's experience, of that of thousands of ambitious men who have found their path to success in the LaSalle Problem Method. During three months' time, 1,089 LaSalle members wrote to the University telling of the "raises" they got as a result of their training. *The average increase per man was 56 per cent.*

These men were not unusual; they had no "pull" or "luck"; they got their start by signing just such a little coupon as appears directly below this text. Mark that coupon, sign and mail today—and *get the facts*. Remember, the cost of LaSalle training is small and can be covered in easy monthly payments, if you so desire. *The decision that you make this moment is important.* Mail the coupon now.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World
Dept. 432HR Chicago, Illinois

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

☐ Higher Accountancy

Training for positions as Auditors, Comptrollers, Certified Public Accountants, Cost Accountants, etc.

Other LaSalle Training Courses

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If more interested in any of these courses, check here:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel and Employment Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accounting and Station Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Expert Bookkeeping |
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Name _____

Present Position _____

Address _____

The Road to Health

Vi-Rex Violet Rays

Treat yourself
at home for:

Asthma, Boils
Blackheads
Catarrh
Colds, Corns
Eczema
Falling Hair
Hay Fever
Headache
Insomnia
Lumbago
Sore Throat
Nervousness
Neuralgia
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Pimples
Rheumatism
Skin Diseases

**Learn the secret of beauty,
health and happiness!**

We have just published a remarkable book for **FREE DISTRIBUTION**. This book explains in detail the manifold uses of Violet Rays in treating almost every known human ailment. It also contains charts and diagrams of the nervous system, and organic locations, and fully describes just how the Violet Ray works its many seeming miracles, written in a simple style—devoid of all technical language.

**Vi-Rex Violet Rays carry life
and vim to every cell—**



The Violet Ray, as used in the treatment of the body, sends a spray of mild, tiny currents through every part and organ; flowing through each infinitesimal cell, massaging it, invigorating it and re-vitalizing it. It leaves no soreness after use, only a delightful sensation of relief. Vi-Rex is *not* a vibrator. It creates cellular massage, the most beneficial electrical treatment known.

Wonderful book sent FREE!
10 day free trial proves all we claim.

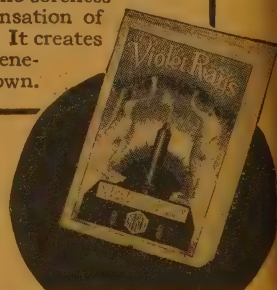
Clip this coupon and mail it today! This wonderful free book will be a revelation to you. We will also give you the details of our 10 day **FREE TRIAL OFFER**, which enables you to test the benefits of Vi-Rex Rays free in the privacy of your home.

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO.

Dept. 96

326 W. Madison St., Chicago

For New York City only, address: 47 W. 34th Street.



VI-REX ELECTRIC CO., Dept. 96
326 West Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me, without any cost or obligation, your free book describing your Violet Ray Machine, and details of your free trial offer.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLII

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 1922

NUMBER 2



Author of "Birthright."

CHAPTER I.

THE UNVEILED MAIDEN.

THE guide's patter was blurring Jimmy Million's first glimpse of the Orient. The fellow dwelt with particularity on the geometrical pattern of a Moresque doorway, while Jimmy tried to synthesize the scene before him. It was all new and dazzling to the American—the mosque swelling against the sky; the bur-noosed crowd flowing through the sunshine; a camel lurching into the entrance of the Place de la Pecherie; donkeys smothered in fruity burdens; the queer eastern smells; the women masked all over in white, showing only their dark, mysterious eyes. No doubt some of these were women no man had ever looked upon, cloistered maidens—

"Notice the 'andwork of the harchways, sir, the decadent period of the later Deys. Compare it, sir, with the 'andwork, at the Djamaa el Kebir, and you'll see—"

Jimmy shook his head with the nervous movement of a man annoyed by a fly. He localized the irritation, turned about, and obviously swallowed an epithet. Next moment he hit on the simple course of action, ran a hand into his pocket, drew out some coins, and said:

"This is as long as I will need you to-day, Feggy—thank you."

The musty little tourist-steerer stared at this abrupt discharge, first at his patron, then at the money and back again. "You don't mean you're sending me away, sir?"

"Yes. To-morrow, perhaps, I'll pick you up around Cook's, but this afternoon—"

"I 'opec, Mr. Million, you're not thinking of doing the rest of Halgiers without a guide, sir—some one as combines a thorough command of Arabic with a knowledge of the manners and customs of the natives, sir; some one as knows the various points of hinterest; the harchitecture of the Moors; the hexact spot where the bandit Raisuli—"

Jimmy Million had read much of this harangue on Mr. Feggy's card that morning. "I am."

"Pardon, sir—ham wot?"

"Doing Algiers without a guide."

"Oh—I see, sir."

The conversation broke off unpromisingly with Mr. Feggy plainly grasping at a straw to continue it. Million patiently held out two five-franc pieces.

The barker considered them without enthusiasm; then, after an embarrassed clearing of the throat and a false start or two, he blurted out: "H-m, Mr. Million, I 'ate to make so bold with a gentleman, sir, but—er—"

"You won't get any more," stated the American. "Ten francs are a day's fee."

"Hit's not that at all," disclaimed Mr. Feggy hastily; "hit's not the money, sir; hit's something—something—I 'ardly know 'ow to get at hit, sir." He removed his greenish bowler, and scrutinized its greasy interior. "Hit's something personal; something I want done, sir, and can't do myself, but if I may make so bold as to say so, you could do hit very easy, sir." He replaced his hat and considered the American anxiously. "I 'ope you are not about to hignite, sir?"

The moral squirmings of the English lower classes are usually disagreeable to a Westerner, but good nature and a certain faint curiosity prompted a smile. "Go on and tell me what you're up to, Feggy."

"With pleasure, sir." The little man made a gratified bob. "Hat this point, sir, many gentlemen hignite, fling their coins in my face and walk off and leave me, sir—a difficult point, sir."

"Apparently," agreed Jimmy solemnly.

"Still, I can't blame 'em, sir. A gentleman is no 'andy man. Take a gentleman in 'is hoffice, sir, in his proper place, and anybody can hemploy 'im. Put 'im on the street, and if the likes of me hoffers 'im a job 'e hignites at once, sir."

"Are you offering me a job?"

"A position, sir," gasped Feggy, with an inspiration.

"Let's get in the shade."

The two men threaded the Place de la Pecherie into the shadow of the mosque.

Inside the entrance half a dozen of the faithful bathed their feet at a fountain before entering for the noon prayer. Jimmy Million led the way to a stone bench just outside the wall and motioned Feggy to be seated.

Feggy seemed to sit at lightly as possible on the *dokana* to avoid any undue familiarity. "Hit's a very simple thing, sir."

"No doubt."

"Hit's only this, sir. I wanted you to go to No. 10 Rue D'Issy and arsk to see Count Nalaczi, sir."

Jimmy nodded non-committally.

"And w'en you see 'im, sir, just arsk 'im as one gentleman to another, sir, if 'e 'as, and will 'e sell, the High of Hallah, sir."

"The High of Hallah?" repeated the American, puzzled.

"Yes, sir. You may offer 'im, as if for yourself, sir, fifty, sixty, or even one or two 'under pounds, sir."

Here Mr. Feggy fished a billbook out of some interior pocket, opened it, and with a dirty fingernail riffled a sheaf of Bank of England notes faced by one for fifty pounds. Million noted this wealth with some surprise.

"What am I to buy?" he asked, seeing the offer was serious.

"Nothing, sir; 'e won't sell."

Million looked around in surprise.

"Now, now," mollified the little barker.

"Then why go?"

"To haffect a friendship, sir, and hap-proach."

Million studied the commonplace figure with a certain sense of queerness. He wondered if it were possible the East, the colorful East, were offering him an adventure through this little cockney.

"What did you call the thing?"

"The High of Hallah, sir."

In an effort to twist these sounds into sense Jimmy struck off the prefixed "h's."

"Oh, the Eye of Allah!"

"Wot I said, sir."

"What is the Eye of Allah?"

Feggy moved a bit nearer to Million and lowered his voice, perhaps to avoid being heard by a ponderous Japanese, who, at the moment, was passing and cajoling a mangy dog to follow.

"A trinket, sir—a bit of crystal in a bit of ivory, sir."

"Oh, a jewel?"

"In a way, sir."

"Why can't you offer your own price?"

The musty little man peeled off four notes and slipped them almost timidly into Million's hands. "Becos I 'ave no hap-proach, sir. Wot would the likes of me be doing walking up to a count's door arsking to buy a jool? I'd never get in, sir. And if I should, the count would look at them bank notes thinking I'd wrote 'em myself—just as you be doing, sir."

Jimmy removed his eyes from the bills a little self-consciously.

"Why carry this money if he won't sell."

"'E won't, but he might, sir."

Jimmy nodded. There was a pause as he stowed the money uncertainly in his waistcoat pocket.

"Is that all I'm to do—go to No. 10 Rue D'Issy, offer this money, and come away?"

"No, sir. This Count Nalaczi is a great gentleman for a game, and I thought—" Mr. Feggy hesitated and obviously speculated on Million out of shallow burnt-umber eyes. "If I may be so bold, might I arsk wot your profession might be, sir?"

"Million almost said 'entomologist,' but this was clearly over the little man's head, so he shifted to: "I'm connected with the American Cotton Growers' Association."

Feggy nodded approvingly. "A cotton man—very good, sir. Seeing you are a cotton man, I fancy you know a *rouge et noir* table when you see one, sir?"

The little man's hand seemed to zigzag.

Jimmy wondered where the new tack led. "Perhaps," he agreed.

"And *trente et quarante*, and *ecarte* and *fan-tan* and—"

"Craps, poker, bridge and *faro*," finished Jimmy quietly; "not an expert, but an amateur in good standing."

"I fancied so, sir!" cried Feggy, gratified. "When I see your face, and your 'orseshoe of diamonds, this morning, sir, says I to myself, 'Feggy, my boy, 'ere's a sporting gentleman as will take you on,' says I."

Jimmy stopped smiling. The notion that he was traveling through the world tagged by his face as a "sporting gentleman" rasped on his nerves. He regarded Feggy with sudden distaste.

"What's gambling got to do with Count Nalaczi?" he asked brusquely.

Feggy looked up at the change of tone. "Nothing, sir, except 'e visits Hafiz Tulek's Palace of Whirling Fortune on the Rue de la Kasbah about twice a week, and 'e plays for the strangest stakes—very strange. No doubt, if a friend should banter 'im to play for the High of Hallah, sir, in a gentlemanly way, no doubt 'e'd do it straight off, when 'e wouldn't think of selling, sir."

Feggy's politic exposition of his scheme was embarrassed by his previous comment on Jimmy's personal appearance.

"So you want me to gamble for the Eye of Allah?"

The barker perceived that somehow he had wandered onto delicate footing. He became as obsequious as dust.

"It's the only chance I see, sir. It isn't for sale, sir, and with the happroach of a gentleman like you, sir—"

"You ask me to rake up an acquaintance with this Nalaczi and beat him out of a jewel—for you?"

"A game for friendship, Mr. Million, sir," truckled the little man apprehensively.

"Don't you mean friendship for a game?"

Mr. Feggy turned his burnt-out eyes away.

"I don't see no difference, sir," he said very humbly.

Million arose in quiet anger "Feggy, I don't know what my face looks like, but you misread it. Good day."

He thrust the bank notes back into Feggy's hand.

"Your face, sir!"

Jimmy turned and started down the *rue*.

The barker was after him in a moment, tremulous. "But, Mr. Million, this is no ordinary affair, sir—"

Jimmy lengthened his stride, threading the burnoosed crowd.

Feggy trotted through the heat just behind the American in despairing placation.

"But let me tell you wot the High of Hallah is, sir," he pleaded as guardedly as his surroundings would permit.

Jimmy did not break his stride, but his anger increased.

"It's a seer's crystal, sir—a magic glass—"

"Doesn't make a particle of difference to me if it was the Philosopher's Stone."

"But, sir, you can tell wot's going to 'appen!" panted Feggy. "'Ow the stock market will break—which 'orse will win—and cotton, sir; w'ether cotton 'll go up or down." Here he touched Jimmy's elbow with a timorous hand. "We'll go fifty-fifty, sir."

Million felt an impulse to turn and kick Mr. Feggy for this offer of partnership. He did turn, and said evenly:

"I don't want to get in bad with the police, Feggy, but if you follow me an inch farther I'll smash your mug."

Mr. Feggy stopped dead, looked hopelessly into Jimmy's angry eyes, mumbled something about "hignited," and turned away among the picturesque crowd on the *rue*.

Million faced about and moved on with the sharp strides of an annoyed man. His fingers went up to his tie and touched his diamond horseshoe pin with a certain disfavor. He wondered if all these brown folk who passed him in robes, in Turkish trousers, in zouave jackets, saw in him a sporting gentleman. He wondered if the women, the dark-eyed, unseen women, looked upon him as—

Million dismissed the idea with a shrug. This barker was a fool—in fact, a lunatic. What had he said about that jewel? Foretell the cotton market—the winning pony at the races?

He wondered if the fellow really were crazy? Every detail except one suggested some one slightly cracked. That was the money. Jimmy had never known an insane person to be at large with that big a roll of bank notes.

He tried to dismiss the whole incident from his mind and plunge once more into the mood of dazzled admiration. But moods are like dreams—they cannot be commandeered.

The American's walk led him out of the narrow streets and tunneled *rues* of the old native quarter onto the sweeping seashore drive bordering the north of Algiers. The moment he turned into this thoroughfare a sea breeze played gratefully over his face and the intense blue of the Mediterranean gladdened his eyes. A low stone coping guarded the boulevard from the sea. After a curve of some two hundred yards this string of masonry was stopped by the high yellow garden wall of a villa. The garden extended some distance out past the sea wall into the water. In the corner between the coping and the villa were a pile of cotton bales. The villa itself was Moresque with a few narrow slitlike windows penetrating its blank yellow sides.

In the angle between the sea wall and the garden Jimmy saw the same mangy dog and ponderous Japanese which had passed him at the mosque. As the American strolled toward them dog and man played an odd little drama. The Celestial must have held some doggish dainty in his hand, for the mongrel slunk closer and closer, making little humble pats with its tail to propitiate any possible wrath in the huge immobile yellow man. Somehow the cur reminded Million of Feggy.

When the frightened beast was fairly close the Japanese kicked. Jimmy was surprised at the swiftness of the action. The big man used his foot with the sudden and accurate adroitness of a hand. The wooden sandal clacked against the cur's slatty ribs, lifted him clear over the low curb, and sent him whirling into the sea.

The unlucky brute yelped, splashed into the waves. It arose swimming for shore, rolling its eyeballs at the Japanese, when there was a whorl in the water behind it. A slimy arm slipped up out of the sea, curled around its mangy form, and the cur sank. Beneath the surface Jimmy saw an indistinct play of shadows, which swiftly vanished, then the little waves splashed peacefully against the garden and the seawall. The ponderous Nipponese turned toward the entrance of the villa.

A hot flush went over Million at the heartless little tragedy. He doubled his fists and strode down the boulevard with

some ill-defined thought of punishing the Celestial. "Here, you!" he called. "What you mean by—"

Apparently the huge yellow man did not hear Jimmy. He did not even look in his direction, but proceeded placidly along the garden side with a curious effect of balancing his ton of a body on his thin legs and small feet. When he passed the cotton the disorder of the bales seemed to offend him. He bent over one bale lying a little distance from the pile, crushed in his big abdomen until he could get his arms about it, then lifted the half-ton weight cleanly, minced down to the pile, and without perceptible exertion, swung it up on top. Then he reached up one hand and moved the bale a little this way and that until it was aligned.

Million's impulse to fight vanished in blank amazement. He stood in his tracks and watched the ponderous yellow man go balancing himself delicately around the corner to the front of the villa. His wooden soles made a faint tapping sound on the hard pavement.

When he had disappeared, Million walked down to the bales almost doubting his own eyes. The feat he had witnessed was incredible. In his boyhood Million had seen negro roustabouts on the Mississippi levee lift cotton bales on a wager. The strongest, by using their knees as a fulcrum, could barely clear a bale from the ground. Even that was herculean.

The mighty swing of the Oriental had torn a little dog-ear in the thick bagging, and Million's interest as a cotton man sent him up on the pile after a sample. On top he pulled out a wisp and stood combing it between thumb and forefinger in the usual test for length of staple, color, luster, and strength. The young fellow's mind still hovered about the remarkable Japanese. He wondered what would have happened if he had been so rash as to strike the giant. He might very easily have been kicked over into the sea along with the cur. Then he wondered why the huge fellow should have tolled the dog to just this place. Did he know it would be seized? That was hardly probable.

As Million revolved these trifles in his

head a perfume down the sea breeze caught his attention and caused him to look about. The top of his bale rose above the level of the wall.

Inside the garden flared a riot of flowers, whose color, intensified by the sunshine, astonished the Westerner. This inflorescence exhaled perfume like a censor. The only subdued tone in the plot was a yellowed marble fountain that played feebly near the center of the enclosure. The lower end of the rectangle had no wall to block it from the sea.

As Million stared at this splendor one of the oddest creatures came out of a bank of flowers, pulling after it an armful of blooms. At first glance the American thought it was a child dressed in a shabby Turkish suit. As it turned a glimpse of its face suggested a dwarfish old man. A moment later, when it set off down the path, the length of its arms and its agility brought the more surprising idea of some sort of trained ape or monkey. The man watched it curiously.

Holding in its long arms a blaze of flowers, it whisked past the fountain toward the sea-end of the garden. Not until the creature almost reached the water did the American observe, standing against the shimmering blue waves, a slender girl weaving a wreath.

The grace of the maiden, heightened by the grotesque foil of her pet, sent a tingle of admiration along Million's nerves. He stood looking fixedly. The girl was as colorful as the garden. The ensemble was as sensuous as a canvas by Alma Tadema or Childe Hassan. Until that moment it never occurred to Million that such scenes really existed.

The American was conscious almost of a physical movement in his head. To him the possibilities of the universe had been widened. He seemed let into another sphere. A kind of glimmering meaning came to him why the outside of Moorish houses were so very plain. The East explains itself better to the blood than to the brain.

As the animal poured out the flowers a spray fell into the water and an indigo wave swung it outward. Instantly the monkey or ape, or whatever it was, strode into the water careless of its baggy trousers.

It was on the verge of swimming after the spray when the thought of another tragedy flashed through Jimmy's mind. He waved his wisp of cotton at the two.

"*Madame*, call your pet back!" he warned. "It's dangerous out there. A moment ago I saw a dog—"

Million never finished his sentence. When the girl turned and saw him her dark eyes widened, then such confusion flooded her face that Jimmy stopped quite disconcerted. For three seconds she stared, as if unable to believe her eyes; then gave a cry, flung up her arms about her face and ran toward a little arbor scattering flowers everywhere.

At her cry the creature in the sea spat-tered out with amazing agility. It caught sight of Million and came bounding toward him with a volley of snarls and a formidable gleam of teeth.

Next moment Jimmy expected to see it scale the wall and be at him on the cotton bales when, to his amazement, it whipped a cane out of its clothes, put it to its mouth and puffed at him in an access of fury. At the same instant the girl in the arbor screamed:

"Gwarli! Gwarli!"

Million waited no longer. He turned and leaped breakneck down the bales, furious at himself for having spied on a Moorish woman. He had known such girls were as sensitive to being seen without veils as American girls would be without clothes. He had known it perfectly well; yet when he watched the girl among the flowers, it had all floated out of his head.

And then he had shouted at her—like a negro to his mule! Shouted—bawled—the young fellow's face grew hot as he walked swiftly back up the sea-wall. Little tremors of self-scorn played through him.

And then he wondered, if he had thought, would he have looked?

"Certainly I wouldn't!" thought Jimmy passionately, striding forward with long steps. "I wouldn't think of—"

His thoughts faded out of intelligible words into a mere feeling of negation. He slowed down his walk somewhat and looked at a sea gull swinging through the air without seeing it. Presently he said aloud, with

a certain heat, "I know I wouldn't—I wouldn't think of such a thing—certainly not—no—" He felt his tie pin.

Presently he slowed up and sat down on the sea-wall and he thought, "Oh, well, it'll never happen again, anyway—the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb—" He looked back down the boulevard at the yellow villa.

Here the cotton man's thoughts wandered off onto the general topic of the claustration of women. He stared at the villa and thought of that lovely girl imprisoned all her life in those walls. She would never know dances and picnics, tennis and flirting, half a dozen different suitors on half a dozen different nights, or moonlight rides. She would remain in walled-up purity for just one man—no other man would ever so much as see the curve of her lips except him—Jimmy Million—and the man she married.

Jimmy drew a long breath and stared down the sweeping boulevard with its robed figures, its secretive houses, and the alien crescent of the mosque glittering against the sky. And Million's apprehension of the East spread a little more through his blood.

For a while he sat in the African sunshine, immersed in thought, then he arose slowly, joined the promenaders and drifted back down the boulevard. When he reached the yellow villa he dropped out of the procession and stood looking at the heavy iron grilled door. His object had been to get the street and number. He looked up at it, then opened his eyes to stare. It was No. 10 Rue D'Issy.

He stood for perhaps ten seconds, then he took the diamond horseshoe out of his tie and put it in his pocket, raised a lion's claw knocker and banged down on the brazen plate. He heard it echo inside.

CHAPTER II.

THE POISONED POMPON.

AFTER another knock and a prolonged wait in front of No. 10 Rue D'Issy Jimmy Million heard a woman's voice inside calling, "Panimurpholos! Panimurpholos!"

A man's drowsy baritone close at hand mumbled an answer. The woman called some reproof in Arabic. Another pause. Came a rattling of bolts and a panel of the door opened very slowly. The aperture framed an ebony negro in yellow Turkish costume, with an irrepressible yawn, twisting his thick lips. The black man stood looking at Jimmy with the filmy gaze of the newly awakened, then his face took on such a look of surprise that Jimmy involuntarily asked what was the matter.

"A dream, *m'sieu'*," said the fellow in French, "a vision of my head, and now it must come true, because the first man I see on waking is an infidel."

The spectacle of a negro in Turkish costume, speaking French, diverted Million. The American's home was in one of the southern States where over half the population is black. So homelike, indeed, were the black faces of Algiers, so irresistibly did they suggest the soft slurring English of Mississippi and Alabama that it always struck Jimmy as droll to hear French instead. He prolonged the conversation to amuse himself.

"What did you dream, nigger?"

The black man perhaps did not understand the derogation in the word "nigger," or if he did he was accustomed to it. He answered with the affability of his race, "I dreamed I was riding a turtle down a well, *m'sieu'*."

"And you want that to come true?"

"A dream is not its meaning, *m'sieu'*," explained the black in yellow, solemnly. "A dream is a shadow of what is to come. A shadow lies flat in the dust, *m'sieu'*, but the thing itself stands erect in the sun. It takes a wise man to divine what is to come from its shadow. A turtle is slow—perhaps I shall ride something swift—or slow, who can tell? A well is a dark and secret place. I may ride in the desert—who knows? In a garden a well is refreshment; in the market place, charity; in the desert, riches. Will my ride bring me wealth or poverty or refreshment—"

The black man pondered these implications, and finally said, "I am no seer. I will tell this dream to the Mokaddam, Ibn Mulai. He will interpret the meaning."

Million drew a two-franc piece from his pocket.

"The Mokaddam will doubtless charge a fee. Mokaddams can't live on air. This is to help you get your dream explained. Now take this card in to Count Nalaczi and tell him it is on special business."

The black man bowed very low, received the coin and the card and stepped aside to admit Jimmy to the *skiffa*, or vestibule of the establishment, then disappeared through an archway calling aloud, "Rouma! Rouma!" (Infidel! Infidel!) as a warning to the women of the place that a stranger had entered their door.

Million had heard of the rich interior decorations of these plain Moorish buildings, but he was not prepared for the richness of the *skiffa* in which he stood. The shadowy interior was spaced with elaborate, twisted columns. Around the wall and over the arched doorways ran a frieze of gorgeous geometrical designs and cursive gilded texts from the Koran. The rear of the hallway gave upon an arcade of swelling Moresque arches, and beyond that glowed a sunlit court brightened with orchids and a fountain.

The ensemble drew Jimmy up. He realized for the first time that he had entered a wealthy man's home on the rather absurd errand of offering him a price for a family jewel. Even in democratic America it is not customary for strollers on Fifth Avenue, say, to drop in on some millionaire householder and offer to buy his finger ring. It isn't done.

Now Jimmy was just about to let himself into the street again and quietly disappear when he heard a rustle and saw a man in a burnoose coming through the columns.

Jimmy was relieved to see that it was not the formidable Japanese, but a middle-aged man of olive tint, dressed expensively in Arab fashion. But it was not so much his *bidi*, sequined with jewels, or his silken hood cords doubled about his waist and falling to the floor, or the odor of musk exhaled from his clothes that stamped the count as a wealthy man. It was rather the manner in which he wore these things. His entire unconsciousness of his apparel and his surroundings advertised to Jimmy that he was

in the presence of so much flesh and bone that had been wrapped in silk all its life.

Count Nalaczi's face held the weariness of all faces which are confined to one stratum of life, be it indigence, middle class or wealth. It was a contradictory face, too; the deep-set eyes of an ascetic was flouted by the full, thick lips of a voluptuary. His cheek bones were prominent, with the skin drawn tight across them. His countenance was seamed and wrinkled by many a conflict of the warring elements it indicated.

He repressed a yawn which expanded his nostrils, bowed slightly, wished his caller peace in the Arab formula, but in the English language, which he spoke without accent, but rather too precisely.

"I hope I can do something for you, Mr. Million."

"I don't know whether you can or not," began the Westerner. "I came to ask you about a jewel."

"About the ruby I won from Mr. Nettleton last night?" The count lifted his hand as if to draw off a pigeon-blood ruby on his forefinger. Jimmy watched the single fiery speck shift in the black stone.

He shook his head: "No, I wanted to ask about another jewel, a crystal called the Eye of Allah."

The sleepiness and indifference vanished from the count's face. "The Eye of Allah?" he repeated.

"A seer's crystal," explained Jimmy.

"Yes, I know—you don't mean you have come for that?"

A faint accent on the "you" somehow made Jimmy feel awkward and hot and sweaty. So he simply repeated his mission and stood waiting for his host to make some readjustment in his thoughts; some rather painful readjustment, if Million could fathom the seamed face.

After a moment he said: "You will pardon my surprise, Mr. Million, but such interest is unusual among Americans and Englishmen, is it not? Will you not be seated?"

He indicated a sofa and sank on it with a lithe movement of unbound limbs.

"After all," continued Nalaczi, "I have been expecting some one to call for the crystal for several years."

"Isn't it yours?" asked Jimmy in surprise.

The count gave a vague smile. "Rather I do not belong to it."

"What do you mean?" asked Jimmy curiously.

"I mean I shall never escape from all this." The count made a gesture that comprehended his rich surroundings. "It is another version of the Buddha in the swine."

Jimmy had never heard of a Buddha in a swine. A vague notion of a pig swallowing a little stone image flitted through his brain, then he dismissed it.

"Why do you want to get away?" inquired the American naively.

"Some souls are feebler than others, Mr. Million," said the count gravely; "and you see one netted in a pile of marble, a skein of silk, and—and a rosy web of flesh—"

The fellow sat brooding for a moment, then arose with a little shudder. "It is easier for me to realize the sun will turn to a cinder floating in blackness than that a woman is an apparition, a whirl of dust, a cinema that smiles and dimples and dances, and is nothing—" He made an abrupt gesture of dismissal, and dropped back into the polite tone of host and guest. "How long have you studied, Mr. Million?"

To a Westerner who has imbibed all his life the Occidental asexual view of Heaven, the Mohammedan notion of a masculine paradise comes as a sort of grotesquerie. Jimmy stared at the count, and with an effort got his mind to the question. He had studied four years in college and three in a technical school, so he said: "Seven."

"You are a fortunate man," said the Arab, "to have your feet placed in the way in your youth. May I ask under whom you studied those seven years?"

"Different professors," said Jimmy; "three in Vanderbilt and four in Georgia Tech."

Count Nalaczi seemed a bit puzzled. He paused in his pacing to look at his visitor. "Georgia," he repeated; "do you mean the Caucasian Georgia?"

It was Jimmy's turn to be a bit at sea: "Why, yes, it's Caucasian all right. It's a

white man's country. There are a lot of negroes down there—but they don't vote."

"Mr. Million, are you speaking of the Georgia between Daghestan and Imeretia?"

The word Daghestan gave Jimmy a clew as to how the count's mental train had been sidetracked. "Oh, not the Georgia in Asia." Jimmy laughed at the idea of there being anything in any school in Asia that an American would care to learn. "This Georgia is in the United States. South of Tennessee and North Carolina. It's where Atlanta is. You're bound to know Atlanta—the New York of the South."

"It's a city?"

"Well, rather." Jimmy gave the conventional chuckle of a man stating a well-known fact. "It's a brisk little burg; and nobody ever has found out what makes it brisk. It's not on a river, there's not a mine in a hundred miles of it; its farming land is punk compared with the West, but somehow that town buzzes."

This eulogy of the Georgian metropolis bubbled out spontaneously because Jimmy was in a foreign country and was talking about home. Jimmy was an Arkansas man himself, but he was far enough away from America, so the whole of Dixie appealed to him as his birthplace.

During Jimmy's little talk on American geography, the count's spirits for some reason seemed to recover. He paused before the enthusiast. "What did you study in this Georgian institution, Mr. Million?"

"Cotton. I specialized on cotton parasites. That's what I came to Algeria for—I'm hunting for a parasite of the cotton boll weevil."

"So you are in Algeria on business."

"As an entomologist."

"Interesting work," complimented the count in the best of spirits.

"Well, I should say so—" And Jimmy went off into a breezy sketch of protective and destructive insects. As Jimmy was an enthusiast about his work, he talked for fifteen or twenty minutes. Nalaczi was a good listener, and so Jimmy was entertained.

In an interim he recalled the crystal. By this time he was on easy footing, so he said: "Now, how about that Eye of Allah

jewel—what kind of a price are you going to make me on it?" Jimmy smacked a fist in a palm and sat smiling, the picture of a friendly easy-going American buyer, who doesn't want to be cheated, but who is willing for the other fellow to make his profit.

"It has no price, Mr. Million. If you feel you have need of it and request it, I will give it to you."

"Give it to me!" Jimmy looked at his host amazed.

"Yes, it has never been sold. It is merely a stone to look into. It aids in mental concentration. It has been handed down through the ages serving this purpose." The count's voice became solemn. "Great men have used this crystal in their psychical development, Mr. Million. Melchisedec, Zoroaster, Manes—it has passed from the great to the great."

"And it has never been sold at all?" cried the American. "It is always given away?" The idea of a series of men willing to give away such a unique curio amazed the man from Arkansas.

"Tradition says it has been sold once," admitted Count Nalaczi, "about nineteen hundred years ago."

"Who sold it then?" inquired the Westerner curiously.

"The adept who gave me the stone told me that its one sale was when Caiaphas offered it with twenty pieces of silver to Judas Iscariot."

A sort of prickly chill swept over Jimmy's body. His mouth opened, but he said nothing.

"When did you hear of this Eye of Allah, Mr. Million?" inquired Count Nalaczi curiously.

"A chap told me of it about an hour ago," admitted Jimmy frankly.

"Do you want it?" asked the count.

"No, no!" cried Jimmy. "I have no use for a—a crystal with a mission, you might call it—you don't really mean to say this jewel existed in the time of Christ?"

"Long before that, I feel sure," said the count, "before Moses to the time of Melchisedec, a wise man, timeless, without father or mother."

Jimmy's ingenuous face took on that

look that shows the other man has pushed his wonder into the unbelievable. He nodded agreeably, said it was the most remarkable curio he had ever heard of, and bowed himself out of the villa.

The hot glare of the African sun and the passing crowds immediately quenched the half mystical mood induced by the count's villa. The American was plumped back into the present. He fancied the count must be some sort of fake, and Feggy, perhaps, was his stool pigeon.

He dismissed the matter from his mind, and then, for some reason, the girl he had seen reasserted herself. With her came the connected thought that Mohammedan women were not allowed to marry foreigners. That seemed to Jimmy an extraordinary and unwarrantable intrusion on personal rights.

He strode down the boulevard frowning and thinking of the girl. Presently an odd idea floated through his head. He wondered what formalities a man had to perform before he could join the Mohammedan Church. To Jimmy, as to many Americans, the idea of changing churches lay as lightly on his heart as changing coats. In fact, the idea somehow appealed to his temperament. So he was smiling and walking down the Rue D'Issy when he heard his name called from the driveway.

He looked about and saw an English girl named Judith Montfairly beckoning to him from a small runabout.

Miss Montfairly was just a pleasant ordinary young woman whom Jimmy had met in the English-speaking circles of Algiers. She was an artist and now shifted some painting paraphernalia to make room in the motor.

As the car moved ahead, the girl began an enthusiastic narrative of how she had obtained a native model. Jimmy knew that this was rather a feat, for the Algerians are superstitious about being painted or photographed. He tried to give his attention to the artist's anecdote, but somehow his thoughts kept slipping back to the girl in the garden. The very wind, dashed in his face by the speeding runabout, brought her to his mind. As the little machine swept around the bay and down the

broad Boulevard de la Republique, he could see her standing weaving flowers against that flashing blue background.

When Miss Montfairly discovered her companion answered absently or not at all, she tried out half a dozen topics on him. She even inquired about his progress in hunting cotton boll weevils, and still he answered with little connection and no spirit.

Both Miss Montfairly and Million were staying in Mustapha Superieur, a southern suburb of Algiers, lying in the foothills of mountains that overlook the city. As the motor wound higher along the perfect French roads, their view of old "El Djazair," as the Arabs call their city, widened.

The town lay in terraces of white; and a high hill held it up in profile against the burning blue of the Mediterranean. Here and there rose the dome of a mosque with its crescent and minarets. For the first time, Jimmy realized that the Moors who built the Alhambra, molded also this lovely African town. As he looked back across the great sweeping horseshoe of their boulevard, a little cavalcade of robe figures mounted on asses, followed by two swaying camels, outward bound for the desert beyond the Atlas, added a last touch to the Oriental charm.

This scene, too, suggested to him the girl in the garden. Both were so arabesque, so flawless, so languorous. The man's blood stirred. He drew a deep breath. At that moment the little runabout came to an uproarious halt in front of Miss Montfairly's small villa.

She shut off her engine, and in the sudden silence that ensued, climbed out.

"You haven't been a bit nice, Jimmy," she smiled, but there was a true bill in her voice.

"I know it, Miss Montfairly," admitted the cotton expert with contrition. "Here, don't bother. I'll get it into the garage. Where did you say you had found your model?"

Miss Montfairly laughed without malice. "About a quarter of an hour ago I was saying I had found one up on the Kasbah, but I have discussed many things since then, bugs and scenery and Major Peleurie and Biskra—"

"Certainly. Now I wasn't so inattentive. You were telling me about Landon's gardens. Said you were going to paint it. How long have you been painting here?"

"About six months."

"Are you acquainted with any of the native families?" Here he rolled back the sliding doors of the garage which were overhung by an archway of climbing roses. The flowers left an aperture just large enough to admit the car.

"Oh, yes, my work forces me among the Arab and Moorish families. I ought not to say 'forces' because I want to go. They are very pleasant folk."

Jimmy went back to the car and ran it up the concrete approach into the shed.

"Why?" she asked, when the motor became silent again.

"I was wondering if you had ever been in the villa of a Count Nalaczi?"

"Yes, I used his house in one of my things that will be in the salon this spring."

Jimmy wanted to ask about the girl, but he hesitated and finally said: "It's very pretty on the inside, isn't it?"

The remark found a sudden response in the girl.

"It's beautiful," she praised. "It's the purest example of the old ornate Moresque in the city. Did you notice that frieze—it's by Hadji in the sixteenth century. Not one of those volute columns, if you observed them, are alike. Each has a different rotation and their capitals are as individual as persons. Nobody in this world, Mr. Million, except Hadji, could have pulled all that together into a—a symphony."

Jimmy listened to this dithyramb in considerable astonishment. He scarcely followed her technicalities at all, but he did perceive that Miss Montfairly's eyes were big and pansy-blue. For a moment he forgot the next question in his mind.

"Do you happen to know a girl who lives there, Miss Montfairly?"

"Aicha?"

"Is that her name?"

"Yes."

Jimmy repeated it. The vowels were like a chord of music.

"How did you know there was a girl there?" asked the artist curiously.

"I saw her," admitted Jimmy frankly.

"Oh—you did!"

"What's the matter?" asked the American, rather taken aback at her tone.

"Don't mention that to anyone else, Jimmy, except me. These Moorish girls feel very keenly about such things—I hope she doesn't know."

"Yes, she saw me. I acted the fool and spoke to her—" Jimmy looked at his companion with that curious tickly feeling in the cheeks that an embarrassed man feels.

"You *spoke* to her?"

"Well, her pet was running into the sea. It would have been killed next moment."

The two stood looking blankly about the little garage at this breach of Oriental convention. A red and green lory blustered into the rose vines at the entrance.

"I don't suppose an introduction is possible?" mused the entomologist vaguely.

"Oh, Jimmy, don't talk nonsense—besides you'll be over it right away. I've known half a dozen young Englishmen and Frenchmen to get an accidental glimpse of a face and be quite sleepless for a night or two—"

Miss Montfairly laughed with friendly satire.

"Anyway I forgive you for being such—a bore on the way up. You had cause. A glimpse of a Moorish girl— Ah! Really, Jimmy, don't you think we English and American women make a great mistake to go about visible?"

"Don't suggest a world of men to me!" cried Million. "Ugh!"

"That's better," nodded the artist. "Now for that I'll tell you why I picked you up downtown. I wanted you to do something for me."

"So it wasn't because I looked so attractive?"

"Partially, perhaps, but mainly because I have never been in Hafiz Tulek's place."

"And you want me to go with you?"

"They say it's the place for costumes and character studies. If I should find anything that would do you would have to act as my go-between to make arrangements for sittings."

Sudden screams from the lory in the rose-bush made Million raise his voice. "When do we go?"

"Any time—to-night if you have nothing else on—be quiet, Jail! Hush, I say!"

The big red and green lory blustered out of the rose vine and lighted on his mistress' shoulder.

"Aw-er-aw," it croaked, "Jail-wants-a-cracker! I see you! I see you!"

"Hush, I say!" She smacked its feathers.

The bird squawked at this punishment and hopped across to Million's shoulder.

"What time shall I come around?" asked Jimmy loudly.

"Aw-er-aw!" vibrated Jail in his ear.

"When I leave home," shouted Miss Montfairly, "I always hope that bird'll be gone when I get back. If I put it in its cage it always begs so hard I turn it out. And destructive— Oh, look! Look! Stop that, Jail! Look, it's tearing your pompon out, Mr. Million!"

"My pompon!" cried Jimmy.

"Yes, from your sun helmet."

"I haven't any pompon!" Jimmy reached for his hat just as Jail removed a scarlet ball of fluff from the crown by a rolling tack-puller motion of the beak.

"Certainly you have. I noticed it on the way up. Get it from him!"

Jimmy caught the fluff in great surprise. Jail held croaking to the other end as it dragged through its beak.

The bird proved no mean antagonist. It fluttered, struck at Jimmy's fingers with his claws; then his grip loosened and he went fluttering to the floor, venting ear-splitting screams. Once down on the concrete floor, the bright red and green bird flopped about in a drunken fashion, doddling under the motor's wheels, against oil cans. Finally with a hoarse: "I see you!" it fluttered to its mistress and collapsed into a green and red bunch of feathers at her feet.

Miss Montfairly grabbed her pet up.

"What did you do to it, Jimmy?" she cried in amazement.

"Why, nothing—I didn't do anything to it! I got this—the pompon—" He looked at the crimson fluff in his hand.

Miss Montfairly drew close with horror dawning in her face. The pompon was a thorn dart with its tip covered with a resinous substance.

Million looked at the missile blankly, then at the girl.

"This thing must be poisoned." He speculated, utterly at sea.

"Why did you put it in your hat?"

"I didn't put it in my hat!"

"How did it come there?"

"I don't know!"

The entomologist stared at the dart. Suddenly he remembered the deformed creature in Count Nalaczi's garden rushing at him violently out of the sea and blowing at him with a cane. A creepy feeling went over the American.

The lory was quite dead.

CHAPTER III.

THE GAMBLE IN GIRLS.

THE Rue de la Kasbah in Algiers is an ancient flight of stone steps tunneled under the second stories of old Moorish houses leading up Kasbah Hill. It is an artery where the colorful blood of Africa mingles with the Levant, with the Roman folk of France, Italy, and Spain, with the prying Teuton and the disdainful Anglo-Saxon.

At night it is illuminated by the booth lights of native merchants; flares revealing the trader in flowing robes with his entire stock in a little niche around him; silks, it may be, or swords, caged birds, perfumes, cheetah irons, Turkish coffee, couscous, amulets, love philters—what may not the passions of that human olio desire?

When Jimmy Million and Miss Montfairly entered the *rue* that evening a musette snarled to the throb of a derkouba. Looking up they saw on a little landing place in the climb a girl dancer writhing to the hot music. She was colored like old bronze, and a booth light over her head glittered on her bangles and amulets. In a corner two negro musicians skirled an insistent tune to her undulations. The black jaws of the musette player puffed and his eyes popped.

The robed crowd curdled about the fare. Black men stared greedily. Half a dozen Turks lolled at a coffee stand watching the serpentine through heavy-lidded eyes. As Million and Miss Montfairly climbed toward the performers the smell of black people perspiring gradually effaced the usual musky, unclean fragrance of the East.

It is the impulse of a white man to ignore anything suggestive when he is with a woman whom he respects. Jimmy's eyes rested momentarily on the bronze girl, as if she had been one with the shining brass door grilles that gleamed along the *rue*, and then he passed on in imperturbable blindness and deafness.

Miss Montfairly looked up at her companion with a dawning amusement in her eyes, but her lips were pressed together quite properly when Jimmy looked around and said:

"Now I'll bet he would make a good model."

The girl peeped through the crowd which her companion overlooked. Her back was to the danseuse.

"Where?" she asked seriously.

A little maneuvering showed the model to her, an extraordinary man with a black muslin mask over his face in a silk scarf of rose and gold. A scarlet belt and scarlet sandals with gold buckles completed his costume. He was in full view once they had reached their vantage point, because the crowd flowed around him without so much as touching the toe of his sandal. He lolled idly on a bench large enough for three men and occupied enough room for a dozen. He watched the dancer.

"Well, shall I go over and ask him to pose?" inquired Jimmy, still ignoring the frantic musette.

"Oh, no," said the girl, quite in earnest now, "I wouldn't stare at him too long, either, if I were you."

Million looked down blankly. "Why?"

"He's a Targui."

"What if he is—he's a nigger, ain't he? Nigger rig himself up like that and a white man ain't allowed to look at him?" The idea struck the soft-voiced American as humorous, almost grotesque.

Miss Montfairly did not at all catch the vast chasm between social planes that Jimmy's observation implied.

"The word 'Targui' means 'raider,'" she continued.

"Raider?"

"Yes, it's a kind of Arabic patois. The Tuareg live out in the desert. They escort caravans from one post to another for a livelihood. They protect them, you know, from—well, from other Tuareg."

"Wouldn't you like him for a model?"

"Oh, yes, but—"

Jimmy patted her shoulder. "Now just leave that to me. I know how to handle niggers. It's the stand you take from the the jump. Why, down in Arkansas we have bad niggers, but I—"

The Southerner's drawl was lost in the vibration of the musette. He detached himself from his companion and drifted across the *rue* with perhaps exaggerated carelessness into the open space about the masked man and took a seat on the bench.

Without looking at the Targui, Jimmy became aware of a sudden stiffening and immobility in his figure. He had been still before, but now, somehow, Jimmy knew that he was intentionally still, like a wild cat in a covert.

Certain faint misgivings went through Jimmy when he saw what a large man the Targui was. The fellow's graceful lines had masked his size. But Jimmy reflected on the racial disparity between himself and his benchmate and his poise returned.

The Southerner drew out a handkerchief, mopped his face, and said as casually as he would have addressed a seatmate at the Memphis Tri-State Fair:

"Pretty hot to-day, ain't it?"

It faintly surprised Jimmy that the desert man did not jerk off his turban and bob, gratified, as his dark brother would have done in Memphis. Instead the folds of black muslin regarded the dancing girl without a flicker.

Then he recalled that Algiers did not speak English, but French, so he corrected himself, flapping his handkerchief, "*Tres chaud, n'est pas?*"

A perfectly impassive result piqued Jimmy somewhat, but did not discourage him.

The young fellow was not easily discouraged. He had obtained his post as entomologist of the Southern Cotton Growers' Association by lobbying the thing through at a convention in New Orleans.

"Do you live in this town, *m'sieu'*?" he inquired in his bad, unidiomatic French.

Million had hardly expected an answer to this, and he was quite taken aback when the figure made a guttural reply.

"Why do you ask a question, *m'sieu'*, which you know already and in which you have no interest?"

Million looked around at the brightly clad man, and after a moment said, "How do you know I know where you live?"

"I saw you speak with—your companion of me—who told you."

"You just saw that?"

The masked man resumed his silent regard of the danseuse.

"Well, say, I really would like to know where you live, now," said Jimmy with a sudden resurgence of boyish frankness, "I'm an American, looking over the country, you know, and—"

"Ouarglum."

Jimmy paused, surprised and rather amused at such brevity. He had it on the tip of his tongue to say, "Do you gargle it?" but the muslin mask did not invite raillery, so he shifted to reciprocal information:

"I'm from Lonoke, Arkansas, near Memphis." Then he added, by way of fuller information, "That's in the South. We got a lot of colored folks, like you, in the South."

The man from Ouarglum made the faint movement of a man annoyed by the chatter of a child.

Jimmy persisted in a casual tourist's voice while he wondered just how he could best broach the subject of an artist's model. "Is Ouarglum a cotton town? If it is I may visit it on my tour. How do you like Algiers?"

"It is unreal," stated the mask sharply.

Jimmy's face frankly showed its surprise. This was a queer charge to file against a place—its unreality. Then he hazarded a guess at what the fellow meant.

"Sure, this place does seem a little

dreamlike and unreal when a chap first blows in. I think it's the mosques that do it. And the white terraces of houses, and all these masked women. Gives you a kind of Arabian Nights feeling—"

The Targui made a swift dissenting gesture. "No, it's a town of emptiness. Men stop and shake you by the hand and say words that mean nothing. Then they walk away."

Jimmy looked at the mask interested at this curious indictment.

"Men laugh when they are not amused."

"We consider that good manners," hedged Jimmy, defending society's smile.

"To lie?"

Jimmy pondered over this, then suddenly broke out laughing. "Well, yes, I should say falsehood is good breeding."

The man from Ouarglum unrolled his bill of complaint. "It is like a play in a playhouse. Nothing is real. Look at that dancing girl. Some of the men throw her coins—and walk on."

"What could they do but walk on?" asked Jimmy, quite at sea.

"Look at those Turks staring at her." He flickered his shrouded eyes at the Ottomans. "They look, feel faintly, drink coffee and go home to their wives—"

Jimmy began to suspect the man to whom he was talking was drunk. That hypothesis would explain his discovery, his general ill-natured accusals. Jimmy had not learned that the Prophet forbids wine and is obeyed.

"Only one man have I seen," said the man from Ouarglum, "who is alive—who lives."

"Who is he?" inquired Jimmy.

"An old man who is going to turn the desert into a place for fishes," guttured the Targui.

By this Jimmy knew the man from the desert was very drunk, indeed. A vague notion of helping him home crossed the American's mind, but was rejected the next moment when he recalled the color of his companion.

"By the way," said Jimmy, "you were talking so rough about those Turks a while ago. You were looking at her, too. You don't think she is built up so bad, do you, eh?"

"Have I arisen and taken her with me?" asked the Targui grimly, turning and looking at Million for the first time. "Does Allah send a flame where there is no fuel?"

A beam from the booth lights penetrated the slit in the mask at just the right angle to show two eyes shining in the darkness with catlike illumination. It was rather a startling effect in the black mask.

The fellow stood up unexpectedly, and to Jimmy's surprise could walk, not only straight, but lithely. The Targui was shoulders above the hubbub of the *rue*. Jimmy stared after him, thinking how well the fellow carried his liquor when his tongue rattled so. A hand touched Million's shoulder. He looked about as Miss Montfairly slipped in beside him on the bench.

"Do I get the model?" she smiled.

"Why, no," said Jimmy, "he's drunk. Couldn't talk business with him." The American watched the tall head and shoulders diminish in perspective, climbing the crowded *rue*.

"Hello, there," ejaculated Jimmy, "that chap turned into Hafiz Tulek's place."

"Did he?" Miss Montfairly arose. "That's where we are going."

Million looked at his companion doubtfully.

"Say, Miss Judith, I don't know about taking you in there while he's on deck. If he gets wrought up there might be a rough house—and I don't believe it would take much to—er—wrought him, either." Jimmy smiled, but he was serious.

Miss Montfairly gave the arm of her boyish companion an impulsive little pat. Her eyes were faintly amused again, but she said soberly enough:

"Oh, we'll stand near the door where we can bob out at a moment's notice." And they started up together.

Hafiz Tulek's place, the Flying Fortune, is about halfway up the Rue de la Kasbah, and is marked by a modern calcium light which fades all the other lamps to a dull yellow. The whitewash of this illumination floods down over a carved green door and over an Abyssinian negro in brilliant uniform. It is the duty of this functionary to open the door to the elect. Million and Miss Montfairly were admitted.

The Flying Fortune held to the columnar decoration of Moresque houses. Behind the pillars of the lobby a semicircle of roulette tables swept around the building, and these were lined with players.

Groups stood here and there, talking. Near the door a company of French military officers played at a wheel. Near the center of the semicircle Jimmy observed the tall Targui in his bright costume. A haze of smoke, the clink of money, the drone of the croupiers, "*Messeurs, faite votre jeu!*" completed the interior.

As Miss Montfairly entered she almost stepped into the arms of a short, middle-aged Frenchman with an aggressive gray mustache, which gave a queer impression of standing at attention as he beamed a welcome on the girl.

"My dear Judith," he felicitated in his own language, seizing both her hands and pressing them in his palms, "this pleasure recoups my losses."

"Unlucky at play, lucky at—"

"No, no, Judith, unlucky at love, too. The adage doesn't hold good for me." He tipped his trim old head to one side and gazed into the artist's eyes with a delicate exaggeration.

The three laughed. Judith freed a hand and introduced Jimmy to Major Peleurie.

The *majeur* bowed ceremoniously. "Are you long in Algiers, *m'sieu'*?"

"He's down to hunt bugs," answered Judith.

"A naturalist?" inquired the officer.

"Not in a broad sense," explained Jimmy, taking an instant fancy to the *majeur*. "I'm hunting just one insect, a parasite of the American Cotton Boll weevil. The Cotton Growers' Association shipped me over here."

Major Peleurie shook Judith's remaining hand enthusiastically.

"Ah, you Americans!" he exclaimed to Million. "Your enterprise! Your Salton Sea! *M'sieu'*, it is inspiring to me how you Americans penned up the Brazos and watered thousands of acres—"

Miss Montfairly began to laugh. "All roads lead to Rome with the *majeur*. You will now hear, Jimmy, how he proposes to turn the Sahara into a lake."

Looking across the *majeur's* back Jimmy saw the lieutenants were also smiling and listening.

"It's a great jest, Mr. Million, a great jest now," shrugged the old officer good naturedly, "but if they will have a little patience—if the world will have a little patience—and may I say, sympathy, *m'sieu'?*" He made a nervous gesture with his well-kept hand. "Mr. Million, what would be the effect of thirty thousand square miles of sea poured into the heart of the Sahara?"

So surprising a question caught Jimmy at a loss. "Are you serious?" he asked doubtfully.

"It's the old Roudaire plan," explained one of the lieutenants coming up from the table.

Jimmy had never heard of the Roudaire plan.

"And it had been approved by that world wizard, De Lesseps, before he left here for a realm of grander engineering feats, I trust." The old fellow crossed himself almost imperceptibly with the tip of his nervous forefinger. "What would it do?"

"I have no idea."

"It would change the whole climatic conditions of North Africa. Tunis and Algeria would become another Riviera. It would change the lizard for the lily; turn a furnace into a flower garden—"

"It's pure poetry," murmured Judith. "I've heard a number of cantos."

But the officer's ardor left no doubt of his earnestness.

"How can you hope to do it, *majeur'?*" asked Jimmy astonished.

"*Donc!*" groaned a lieutenant.

"If you start the *majeur* telling how to inundate the Sahara I'll go watch the games," said Judith.

One of the lieutenants, whom Jimmy afterward knew as Lieutenant Mendier, seconded Judith's protest.

As the *majeur* was being scouted out of court, Jimmy felt a slight tug at his sleeve. He glanced down and found himself looking into the abject face of Mr. Feggy. There was something almost startling about the little fellow's abrupt appearance. The

strained impression on the cockney's face helped the impression. Jimmy found an instant to wonder how he had got by the big Abyssinian at the door.

"Arsk 'im 'ow 'e can do it, Mr. Million, sir," aspirated Feggy as if his own fortune depended upon the scheme. "'Ow will 'e hirrigate the desert, sir?"

The *majeur* heard the English question, and revolved on Feggy, paying no attention to his mean estate.

"Your map will answer you, *m'sieu'?*" addressed the officer. "The sphere of inundation begins at the Gulf of Gabes on the east coast of Tunis. A series of deep depressions which the Arabs call chotts lead straight into the Sahara to Biskra, a distance of fifteen hundred miles. Now observe—" Here the *majeur* walked over to a roulette table, followed by Jimmy and Feggy. He moved a wager carefully out of the way. The lieutenant, whose stake had been removed, put it in his pocket and walked off, smiling. The *majeur* began tracing an invisible map with his fingertip.

"Here is Gabes. Canalize a sand ridge thirteen miles wide and a hundred and fifty feet high, and you reach Chott el Fejej; a still shorter cut brings us to Chott Jerid; next comes Chott Garsa, then Chott Rarsa, which washes the very walls of Biskra. And what have we done, *m'sieu's?*" The enthusiast extended two magnetic palms toward his listeners. "Spread health and happiness over fifty thousand square miles of desert. You have healed the world's greatest burn, and gardenized Hades!"

A glint came into Mr. Feggy's pale eyes. "Wot 'olds you back—lack o' money, sir?"

There was a certain ring of ability in the way Mr. Feggy said "money" that caught Jimmy's attention, and again he thought of the bank notes the little man had given him.

"Lack of broad-gauge men is the greatest obstacle, *m'sieu'?*" said the *majeur* politely. "Lack of funds is incidental."

"Wot would it take, sir?" The cockney sounded as if he meant to draw out his wallet then and there and finance the plan. Jimmy watched him curiously.

"About a hundred and fifty million francs, *m'sieu'.*"

Feggy considered the sum, then said: "I 'ave a little scheme, sir. If I could only hobtain—" He glanced at Jimmy and became silent.

By an effort Jimmy kept from laughing outright. It was too absurd. The notion of the *majeur* flooding the Sahara by aid of financial support from a tatterdemalion on trail of a seer's crystal!

The *majeur* went on seriously: "I am already handling the native end of this venture, M'sieu'—"

Here Jimmy introduced the two.

"I am swinging the natives into line, looking forward to that day, M'sieu' Feggy, when capital shall rectify Nature's geologic mistake."

Mr. Feggy nodded.

"For instance, that tall Targui over yonder between those columns. He has been in Algiers almost two weeks now, going into this matter with me. He is spokesman for the men of Ouarglum, their sheik."

Mention of Ouarglum in connection with the wildcat project reminded Jimmy of the Targui speaking of the man who wanted to make the desert a sea. So the big cat-like fellow had not been drunk, after all.

Major Peleurie's observation shifted the attention of the whole crowd to the tall masked figure in the center archway. Then Jimmy perceived that a sudden and remarkable silence had fallen over the whole of the Flying Fortune. The attention of the room was centered on the Targui and a man concealed behind one of the columns.

The man from Ouarglum was saying in his blurry voice: "Gold, *m'sieu'*, is a dull hazard. What if I win? What if you win? There is more gold—there is always more gold for the taking."

"What is there to stake that cannot be renewed?"

Jimmy recognized Nalaczi's indifferent voice, although he could not see him.

"In order, *m'sieu'*, that we may feel our hazard and live—"

Here a movement of the crowd as it edged in toward the speaker lost the rest of the sentence for Million.

After a two or three minute interval a chorus of protest, that seemed quite invol-

untary, broke out from the group nearest the players. Came sudden exclamations in Arabic. An old Moslem in Turkish trousers held up a skinny hand and wavered in French:

"My brothers—the Prophet forbids!"

Suddenly one of the lieutenants, who must have understood Arabic, turned to Mendier: "Did you get that—Nalaczi gambling off his wife!"

At that moment Judith Montfairly, who had slipped away from the discussion of the Sahara project, came almost running through the crowd with whitened face. "Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy!" she gasped. "Stop them! They are going to play for—for—"

"What is it, Judith?" rapped out the *majeur*, who was just emerging from the spell of his own eloquence.

"He's gambling away—*Aicha!*" blurted out the girl in a tremble.

"Who?"

"That—that awful count." Suddenly she put a hand on Jimmy's shoulder and began to cry against it.

"Why, it's illegal!" snapped out an under officer.

"No, it isn't," corrected Mendier coolly. "She is his ward, not his wife; though I understand he meant to marry her himself."

"My dear Judith!" cried the *majeur*, waking up and looking immensely entertained as he pushed his way toward the central table. "Haven't you heard that marriage was a lottery? Don't weep!" In passing he patted her shoulder.

Judith jerked her shoulder away. "Let me alone! You're as bad as he!"

"But it may end happily," bubbled the *majeur*. "The chances are perhaps better. It ought to be the universal custom." He shoved forward. Every one in the room pressed in on the gamblers.

Million went forward with the others. The men had placed their stakes. On the red and black table lay a dagger and the pigeon-blood ruby which Jimmy had seen on Nalaczi's finger that morning. Yet they were not exactly the stakes, but represented the stakes. The ruby was on the rouge.

The young lieutenants ringed about,

peering over burnoosed shoulders, their eyes glistening at this gamble in women. They were young and their desires promiscuous; to them women were a gamble.

The gleam of the ruby held Million's eyes as the croupier flirted the bowl one way and sent the ball flying in the reverse direction. An instant silence fell over the Flying Fortune; the only sound audible was the faint purring of the ball in the groove.

Million watched it with a sense of something stretching in his brain. A sweat broke out on his face. The girl he had seen in the garden staked like a pawn on a roulette table! In the stillness the throb of the derkouba barely penetrated the green door of the gambling house. It felt like a painful pulse in Jimmy's head. A thought came as to what would be the girl's fate if the Targui won. With an effort he shut it out of his conscious mind and fixed his eyes on the wheel. The ball circled and circled and circled endlessly. The sound played on Million's raw nerves. After an endless wait, with a little rattle and click, it dropped down into a slot. The whole room jammed forward. The croupier announced:

"Zero!"

A general uproar followed. Half a dozen men relighted cigars and cigarettes.

Everybody laughed in relief.

"Stakes are off!" "The bank gets it!"

"Both girls belong to Hafiz Tulek!"

"It is a sign! Allah forbids it!" exulted the old Turk.

"What 'll you take for 'em, Hafiz?" cried a voice in English.

The old Turk, who sat behind his tables, wagged a tall red fez and a big nose in negation. "Not mine. I have four jealous ones already waiting for me to die. I am an old man. Let the gentlemen play again."

Goombah Das lifted his broad chest in a deep breath. "Yes, spin again! I am living! Spin!"

"But Allah forbids it," wavered the old Turk. "It is a sign!"

"Play it out!" roared Major Peleurie, his eyes protruding, his mustache bristling. He seemed swollen by an interior storm.

"Let me hold the stakes!" laughed Mendier, with a flash of even teeth.

Nalaczi signaled the croupier, who flipped the ball again.

The same sort of tension was not duplicated in Million's nerves. He became aware of a sickly odor of smoke and whisky in the air, and it went with a gamble in women. He looked at Nalaczi, this man with æsthetic inclinations, and a profound disgust filled him. The count's heavy, sensual jaw and mouth became a gargoyle in Jimmy's eyes. The bowl made a soft sibilance as it whirled.

The American seemed to stare through the roulette wheel, and he saw a girl standing in a flower garden by the sea. The flying pellet would whirl that lovely creature into the burning desert, or drop her, along with another pawn, into Nalaczi's harem. She was a nonentity, a placation—she was so much rosy flesh, this young woman with her seagoing dreams.

A kind of shiver of fury went through Million so that it dampened his lower eyelids; his nostrils expanded. He was still staring fixedly at Nalaczi when the hubbub broke out again. Some one shook his arm. He looked down. Judith clung to him, almost in a collapse of relief.

"Rouge won, Jimmy!" she gasped. "Rouge—Aïcha won't be sent away."

"I could lick hell out of 'em!" said the entomologist thickly.

"I'd help you!" cried the artist.

At his place before the table the Targui seemed to come out of some sort of trance. He bowed slightly toward the Moor.

"I thank you, *m'sieu'*, for a memorable night. I will deliver—a parcel to you before morning."

He started for the door, and the crowd made way for his tawny, decorated figure.

Nalaczi picked up neither dagger nor ruby, but waved them toward the croupier as the bank's per cent of the wager. From his stool old Hafiz Tulek hissed a "*Merci, m'sieu'!*"

The crowd began chattering again in relief. A few turned back to the tables, but ordinary play had grown stale. Some of the audience loitered aimlessly about the lobby as men who are loath to leave a

place where a tragedy has occurred. Others went home. The croupiers resumed their singsong. The drama was over.

Jimmy Million and Miss Montfairly drifted into the rue again. The entomologist was still dazed and wrathful. He began aimlessly ascending the stairway, taking up the course he left off. Miss Montfairly said:

"Surely he won't pay."

"Oh, yes, he will," growled Million.

"But the count—would he really have sent away Achai—to a stranger?"

"Oh, don't talk about it! Don't talk about it!" Jimmy's voice rose a shivering octave as if from a thrust of pain.

"Oh, my poor boy!" Miss Montfairly pressed his arm to her side momentarily. They climbed a few minutes, then the artist pulled up her companion in his stride and looked about her. "Which way are we going, Jimmy?"

Both stopped. It must have been getting on toward morning, for the Rue de la Kasbah was emptying fast. Even while they hesitated the derkouba and musette ceased and left a sensible silence in the long, slanting rue. Up and down the flagged steps the booth lights were winking out one by one, leaving burning only a few street lamps required by the French municipality.

Under one of these illuminations, at some distance higher up, passed a tall figure with a glint of color in it. Judith identified it at once.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she gasped. "There he goes—look!!"

Both stared.

"I wonder if he will?" pressed Miss Montfairly nervously.

"He's sure to."

And with the words both Jimmy and Judith turned instinctively up the stairs after the Targui.

"It seems—if he loved her—"

"Oh, bosh! Love is such a—bosh!"

The American's anger and disgust welled up again.

Both the westerners were climbing at a breathless pace now, trying to keep in sight of the tall figure that appeared beneath the lamps and disappeared in the shadows.

Suddenly Miss Montfairly said as if quite surprised: "Look here, Jimmy, are we following him?"

"This is pretty—pretty crude, isn't it?"

They stared at each other in the gloom. The figure ahead passed under another light. The fascination of the strange drama seized them.

Miss Montfairly moistened her lips with her tongue and said, with a sort of gasp: "Well—I don't care—I'll be nice all the rest of my life—but—"

They started at a breathless pace up the uneven stairs. Under a light Jimmy saw the Targui turn off a little side rue. He marked the place, not daring to take his eyes off of it.

When they reached the corner they found the width of the side street about two yards. It wriggled like a snake between dank houses. The two hurried ahead, gripping each other's hand. At a turn they saw, some fifty yards ahead, the tall, gaudy figure pass under a dim door-lamp into a dwelling. The westerners slackened and came forward on tiptoe. They crept past the Targui's door, holding the shadow side of the rue.

When they reached full gloom again they came to a rest, breathing silently through open mouths. They still held each other's hands, and Jimmy could feel the girl's pulse beating.

For several minutes as he listened Jimmy could hear nothing but the blood murmuring in his ears; then he was startled by a sharp noise in the Targui's house. It was the whinny of a horse. This died away in the snuffing peculiar to stallions; then silence fell again over the dim rue.

A faint night wind breathed into their faces, bringing the peculiar smell of the East—the smell of spice, dried dung, animals and flowers, of things cleaned by scraping. Their wait lengthened indefinitely.

Presently Judith whispered with a little breath of relief: "After all, he's not going to do anything."

Million pressed her hand in sympathy.

"I wonder if Nalaczi would have?"

The American stood studying this over a moment, and then whispered a little loudly,

as if a hopeful thought had just struck him: "By the way, Nalaczi has no moral claim on her now—has he? I mean—"

Judith looked around in the gloom, surprised. Her hair and forehead touched his face, and they silently readjusted their positions.

"I don't know," she whispered, and stood for a moment as if pondering exactly what the hushed elation in the American's tone meant.

Then she said briskly: "Well, we can't stand here all night. We ought not to have come. Really our breeding is barbarous. Did you know, Jimmy, the Arab charge against us is that we are coarse, unrefined; in short, boors? Well, let's go."

The droning of some nocturnal beetle caused the entomologist to glance up. At that moment a woman's wail arose from the interior of the house. This rapidly swelled to a shriek, and then came sounds of a struggle.

At the first note the artist clutched Jimmy's arm in sympathetic terror. The screams were plainly approaching the door; then they gave way to a frantic pleading in Arabic.

Although neither watcher understood a word of the desperate outpouring, its meaning stood before them like rubric English. Miss Montfairly began gasping, "Oh, oh, oh!" as if in pain.

A moment later the door swung open and a tall figure came out with a white object writhing in his arms. Under the lamp Jimmy glimpsed a golden face distorted with terror. The figure suddenly flung her arms up about the giant's neck, pulled her lips up to his, pleading desperately.

The man from Ouarglum guttured something in his captive's ear. What it was Million could never divine, but the woman dropped limp in the great arms and they passed into the shadowy rue.

The two westerners followed this tragic payment at a long distance. It formed a queer contrast, the progress of the European and the African pair down the smelly darkness. At the end of the cross street the curious procession turned into the Rue de la Kasbah. By this time the long flight of steps lay quite deserted and silent. Even

the Flying Fortune had closed; its green door was faintly discernible.

Halfway down the endless stairs the man from Ouarglum placed his burden on her feet and the two moved on together. In the Place de la Pecherie the Africans paused before the mosque. In their posture beneath the dark, swelling dome there was something so tragic and somber that a renewed rush of shame for their espionage seized the westerners, but the agony of the strange drama would not loose them. They stared like hypnotized persons at the dark figures of the man and woman, the dark dome overhead, and the faint twinkle of the crescent on its finial. Presently all four moved forward again.

A sea breeze cooled Jimmy's hot face as he turned into the boulevard. The waves still *sip-sipped* at the foot of the garden and the sea wall; then, with a faint surprise, Million made out that the bales of cotton which he had mounted that afternoon had been removed.

In front of No. 10 Rue D'Issy the Targui and the woman paused and their figures melted into an embrace of passionate misery that was silhouetted against the yellow background of the villa. The westerners turned abruptly and stared out at sea.

Miss Montfairly sobbed quietly.

A sudden booming of the knocker on Count Nalaczi's door shook the street out of its lethargy. Two or three dogs began howling. Further down the boulevard an outraged voice shouted something in Arabic. A little later the grating of No. 10 Rue D'Issy swung open, and a vast, bellying form appeared in the dark opening, holding a taper in one hand.

The desert woman gave a little shaken cry at the sight of this enormous Oriental. The Targui lifted his divorced wife and handed her in like a package.

The Japanese did not lower his light, but accepted the burden on his forearm and shifted her across his vast chest as he would a child. Then he extended the hand in which he held the taper, and with a forefinger swung the big iron grating to with a clang.

The Targui walked back up the street so rapidly that he soon overtook Million

and Miss Montfairly. As he passed them he slackened his pace and said, without looking around:

"You followed me."

Both westerners were completely taken aback. A queer freak of memory brought to Jimmy's mind the day his father had caught him behind the barn door learning to smoke. The old planter had twisted his mustache, hemmed as if about to speak, and walked off. The recollection vanished as quickly as it came.

Jimmy moved around between the tribesman and Miss Montfairly.

"Well—yes, we did," he said, and waited alertly.

"I saw you watch the game at the Flying Fortune," proceeded the Targui in his heavy voice. "From your face, *m'sieu'*, the ruby that lay on the table might have been your own."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

A little vibrating sensation went through Jimmy's chest. He peered at the masked man, but could make out nothing.

"It was such a strange wager," mumbled Jimmy, more nonplused than ever.

"Yes, and I have paid," guttured Goombah Das. "Now let the count keep his winnings if he can!" He hesitated a moment, then went on: "It is possible that we may each aid the other in the desire of his heart; otherwise, when you passed under my lamp to-night, I would have stopped you dead."

With this the man from Ouarglum quickened his lithe stride and rapidly distanced the westerners.

As Million walked along the boulevard he pondered over the Targui's last phrase, "I would have stopped you dead."

The sentence seemed equivocal, not to say sinister.



The Boss of Camp K

by John Holden

Author of "The Drifter," "Beyond Control," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

A NEW JOB.

LIKE many other young men, Paul Monroe was dissatisfied with his job. The business of setting down figures in ledgers and day-books had never appealed to him as an ideal occupation, but since he

had started to make a living as a book-keeper, it did not seem expedient to make a change. In any other line he would have to commence all over again at a reduced salary, and his remuneration was already too low for the growing needs of an energetic fellow who wished to participate in every activity that life has to offer. He

could, however, do his bookkeeping for an employer more generous than his present one, and it was his desire to accomplish such a change of bosses that led him to peruse the help wanted column of his evening newspaper.

Paul noted the usual preponderance of advertisements that offered small salaries, but large opportunities, and he passed them by with scorn. Experience had taught him that well-paid office jobs offer just as much chance for advancement as low-salaried ones, and that, in most cases, the lure of great opportunity is a mere excuse for the payment of starvation wages. Finally, however, he came to an advertisement that claimed his attention:

ASSISTANT bookkeeper; preference given to man already employed; good opportunity and good salary; state experience and reason for wishing to quit present employment. Box 315 Herald.

That seemed to be just what Paul Monroe was looking for. He was an assistant bookkeeper, and he was already employed, and he could give numerous reasons for desiring to make a change.

In fact, as he penned a reply to this somewhat unusual advertisement, Paul rather dilated upon the shortcomings of his present position. He stated that, although his salary had been increased twice, it was still less than other firms paid for similar work; that the office wherein he was employed was badly arranged and poorly lighted; that modern appliances were lacking; that his boss was not a cheerful man; that he would much prefer to be connected with a more up-to-date establishment. As he finished his letter and took it out to a mail box, he felt a bit proud of his authorship. So far as he could see he fulfilled every requirement, and he did not doubt that he would at least receive an invitation to call at the advertiser's office for a personal interview.

When Paul started upon his routine of debits and credits next morning he experienced no feeling of disloyalty toward Mr. Brundell, his present employer. In the event that he secured a new and better position, he would give due notice of his

resignation. It was entirely within his right to seek a better job, just as it was Mr. Brundell's to seek more profitable buyers for the company's product.

Paul, therefore, was not troubled by a guilty conscience when he received a summons to the boss's office. He supposed that Brundell had something to say to him about the office work.

It was with a feeling of astonishment and dismay, therefore, that Paul noticed in Brundell's hand the identical letter of application that he had penned the previous evening. He gasped and a somewhat sickish feeling possessed him. Brundell, then, was the man who had advertised; the man he had criticized in his letter was the one he had written to!

Brundell smiled sardonically as he appraised the embarrassed young man who stood before him.

"So we don't pay you enough, eh, Monroe?" he queried in a voice that was like the rasp of a file. "Our office is old-fashioned, your boss is a grouch, you want to get out and go to work elsewhere. Is that right?"

Paul did not attempt to hedge.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but in writing that letter I did not mean to be disrespectful. I merely stated what I felt to be the truth. I had no idea that it was you who had advertised."

"Didn't you know that Evans is leaving and that I must replace him?"

"No, sir. I don't join in the gossip during office hours. I attend to my work. And I think you must admit, Mr. Brundell, that it is well done."

"Well enough, yes—but I don't want a dissatisfied clerk in my office, Monroe."

Paul said nothing.

"So I think that, under the circumstances, it would be just as well for you to leave me now as later. You will therefore call at the office and get whatever is due you, and I will bid you good-by." The boss turned to his desk with a gesture of dismissal.

"Good-by, sir," said Paul, and walked out.

He received the few dollars that were due him, and a few minutes later found

himself on the street, jobless and not very far from destitution.

As he paced aimlessly about, however, Paul was conscious of a feeling of relief mingled with his natural feeling of alarm. He was jobless and almost penniless, true—but also he was free of duties that he had never liked and which had recently proved more irksome than ever. No longer was he circumscribed by the four walls of a dingy office; the chain that bound him to dull routine was broken; the nagging voice of Brundell would no longer be heard.

His first thought was to seek other employment along the line of his experience, but as he continued to saunter in the open air the idea became increasingly repugnant. The temptation to shun office work in the future assailed him.

It was springtime, and the city wherein Paul Monroe sauntered, striving to make up his mind as to how he would earn a living, was the vigorous and growing city of St. Paul, Minnesota. The winter's snow had only recently retreated before the increasing warmth of the rejuvenating sunshine, and everywhere signs of new life were abundant. Green grass was springing up in the parks, trees were budding, birds were singing, children were playing.

Presently Paul found himself in the lower part of the city, where employment offices abounded, and rough-looking men—lumberjacks and railroad laborers—thronged the streets.

There had been a time, not long since, when the sight of these uncouth fellows would have been repugnant to him. He had been a bit of a dandy, with a serious mental attitude toward such weighty problems as the cut of his coat and the size of the knot in his necktie.

But now Paul Monroe was beginning to think he had made a mistake. Was it not a fact that these fellows lived a gloriously free and untrammelled life in the open air? Did they not bask in sunshine and breathe the free air of the out-of-doors, while he and all his clerical class were chained to four dingy walls and dimly lighted desks and the small routine of calculating the profits made by other men? Was not all office work insignificant compared, for in-

stance, with the actual laying of steel rails that would bring opportunity and prosperity to perhaps tens of thousands of new settlers in the prairie country west of St. Paul that still supported only a fraction of its potential population?

For the first time in his life Paul Monroe looked through and beneath the rough exterior of these horny-handed sons of toil, and the more he looked the more he found to admire. Though Paul himself was far from being a weakling, he had to admit that physically many of these men were probably superior to him—simply because their muscles were accustomed to performing real work and his were not.

He talked to some of them, and there again he was not displeased. Their speech was uncultured, true—but it was sincere and straight to the point. He asked about one's prospect of securing work at railroad building, and was told that the employment agencies were shipping men out West daily.

After a while Paul paused in front of one of these agencies, where a large sign informed the world that, for a fee of two dollars, a job that would probably last all summer could be secured. He entered the place and asked for employment.

The proprietor eyed him with a cold and calculating eye.

"A white-collar guy like you in a railroad camp?" he said. "What could you do?"

"Anything," Paul replied with indignation. "I don't look like a cripple, do I?"

"Let's see your hands."

Paul showed them. They were clean and his nails had been manicured recently, but they won no favor on that account.

"What? Do railroad work with lily-white hands like those?" The man shook his head. "No, fellow, you couldn't stand the gaff. It's real workers that we want." And he turned away to speak to an ox-like Swede, who also had evinced a desire to secure a job.

"Ship you out to-night, Ole," he said. "Got any pals that want to go along with you?"

Paul turned angrily toward the door. To be rejected in favor of a low-browed hulk

like Ole! The implied aspersion on his manhood stung him to the quick. He was almost in a fighting mood. A man who had been standing just inside the door noticed this and followed him outside.

"Hey, buddy," he said, and Paul stopped. "Just thought I'd give you a tip," the man went on. "Ditch that white choker and dirty up your hands a bit and you can land a job all right."

Paul thanked his informant and walked home. In his room he attired himself in working clothes and rubbed a little dust into his hands, then returned to an employment agency next door to the first one, and this time experienced no difficulty in securing the desired job.

That night he reported at a designated railroad station, and after checking his suit case with the employment man as a guarantee that he would not desert the train *en route* to Montana, he was herded into an ancient day coach along with as choice an assortment of roughnecks as could have been found in all St. Paul.

But they were real men, Paul reflected, and they were on their way to a place where real work was to be done. He felt proud to be numbered as one of them.

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE THREATENS.

IT was nearly a week later when Paul Monroe and his companions disembarked at the headquarters camp of the Billings and Northern Railroad.

They had not been pampered *en route*. They had slept in the day coach, cuddled as comfortably as might be on the seats, and their food had been procured haphazard at different stations. It was very different from the life that Paul had led previously, but he was not displeased. A new world had been opened up to him. He had enjoyed listening to the experiences and adventures of his companions, as related by them during the long days and nights, and more than once he had experienced a thrill as the train passed some point where history had been made during that not-far-distant period when red men ruled the plains.

At headquarters Paul and his fellow laborers were appraised like so many cattle on the hoof, and assigned to different camps along the line. Wagons from these camps were awaiting them, and presently Paul found himself being jolted over a rough road to Camp K, owned by a man named Patterson, who was reputed to be the best employer on the line.

Paul did not, however, meet Mr. Patterson at Camp K. A foreman named Tausig was on hand to take charge of him and his fellows, and Paul quickly realized that life under this Tausig person was not likely to be one long, sweet song.

"Come on!" growled Tausig, and the newcomers followed him to a flimsy bunkhouse composed of one layer of boards covered by tar paper. "There's where you sleep," he snapped, and pointed to some wooden bunks, built one above the other and filled with hay. "You can get blankets from the commissary to-night. It's just about dinner time, so you can eat first; then report to me down at the big cut."

Paul took an instinctive dislike to Tausig. The man was as low-browed as an orangutan and built somewhat like one, too—broad-chested and heavy-shouldered and seemingly as strong as an ox. Every word he uttered was a snarl. Paul foresaw a difficult time with such a boss.

But he wasted no time in gloomy forebodings. He was still enchanted with the change in his manner of living. The Montana air was like nectar, the sunshine a golden flood of glory that warmed and energized him. How different from the dingy office wherein he had labored for a pittance!

He walked to the high, rocky hill, through which the Patterson forces were blasting a narrow passageway for the steel rails that would soon bring the manifold advantages of easy transportation to this hitherto unsettled region, and as he reflected upon the work that was here being done a sense of dignity and importance welled up within him. This was a field of endeavor worthy of any man's strength and courage.

Paul's reverie was interrupted by the welcome *clang-a-lang* of the dinner gong, and he sat down to a meal that surprised him by its excellence. Huge platters of roast

beef, enormous dishes of mashed potatoes, vegetables without stint, well-cooked rice pudding—it was different, indeed, from the salt pork and beans that he had expected.

He saw Mr. Patterson at a distance, and the man's appearance confirmed all the good reports he had heard of him. His manner was as different from Tausig's as day is different from night.

But it was under Tausig that Paul had to work, and as he set about his task after dinner he became increasingly certain that he would earn every cent that he received. His job was to lift small and medium-sized pieces of rock into the narrow-gauge dump cars that would carry them away, the larger pieces being hoisted by a crane. He labored steadily for two or three hours, or until his bare hands were sore and his back felt as though it was about to break, and then he stood upright for a moment's respite from the arduous labor. It happened that the foreman appeared at that moment.

"What's the matter?" he snapped. "Didn't you ever do regular work before?"

Paul made no reply, but bent to his task again. Tausig stood eying him.

"Hell of a nerve those employment guys have to send me a dub like you," he stated. "Good-for-nothin' pen-pusher—cigarette-smoking loafer—what made you think you could do real work, heh?"

"I'm doing as much as anybody else," Paul replied, "and I'm not a loafer."

Tausig glared. "You're not, eh? Well, heave those rocks into that car there and heave 'em fast."

Paul said nothing, but went on with his work, thinking that Tausig would let up on him presently and go away. But the foreman seemed to think that the new gang needed a bit of disciplining and he could best accomplish it by bawling out the member who seemed most out of place.

"Why don't you heave 'em faster?" he snarled. "What's the matter? Got sore hands?"

"Yes," said Paul.

"You ought to have sense enough to buy gloves."

Paul worked as fast as he could, though his hands were giving him more and more trouble. Tausig went away, but returned

in a few moments and growled again about the progress of the work.

"I'd like to take time off to buy gloves," said Paul.

Tausig shook his head. "Can't give you no time off," he snapped. "Can't be bothered entering you up in the time book every minute. Get busy!"

Paul did, but after a while he protested again.

"I simply can't continue, Mr. Tausig, if I don't wear gloves."

The foreman whipped out his time book.

"All right, then. Quit. I don't want you, anyhow. You're no good. Lily fingers like you never are."

Paul gasped. "You mean—I'm discharged?"

"You heard me say it, didn't you?"

Paul straightened up with difficulty and took a full breath.

"After I came all the way out from St. Paul to take this job?"

"I didn't ask you to come, did I?"

"Oh, very well. Guess I can get on at same other camp." But Paul thought with regret of the good table Mr. Patterson set and wondered if he would fare as well elsewhere, if indeed he succeeded in landing another job. "Give me my time and I'll travel," he added.

Tausig laughed gratingly.

"Your time? What time?"

"The time I've worked on this job, of course. Haven't I been throwing these rocks into a dump car for three hours or more?"

"Didn't you get your dinner?" Tausig countered.

"Yes, but that's no compensation for three hours of hard labor."

Tausig made an entry in his time book and shoved it back into his pocket.

"The kind of work you did don't count. You got your dinner and that's all you're going to get. Now quit arguing and get t' hell outa here."

Paul grew increasingly angry as the thought that he was being cheated out of three hours' pay burned into his mind. Never in all his life had he worked so hard. He faced the foreman.

"I insist on my rights," he said.

Tausig clenched fists that looked as big

as hams. "I'll hang a right hook on your jaw in a minute if you don't shut up."

Paul's fists clenched, too. But his common sense told him that physical combat with Tausig might be disastrous at that moment. The man was as hard as iron, whereas Paul's muscles were soft and untrained, and furthermore were now cramped and sore from his unwonted labor. With an effort he refrained from launching himself at his enemy in the blind, unreasoning manner that instinct demanded.

"I'll talk to the owner," he said, and strode away, followed by the foreman's taunting laughter.

CHAPTER III.

CONFLICT.

PAUL found Mr. Patterson in his flimsy little office. The contractor seemed troubled by something. He was checking what appeared to be a payroll, and he was frowning and muttering to himself.

At a glance one could tell that he was as different from Foreman Tausig as justice is different from lynch law. His eyes were kind and rather easy-going, his big frame moved slowly, he seemed to lack the aggressiveness that marked his brutal employee.

"Good day; what can I do for you?" he inquired.

In a few words Paul explained his difficulty.

"Well, well!" said the contractor. "I'm sure there must be some mistake. Tausig has a good deal on his mind, you know, and sometimes he acts a bit hastily. But he's always ready to do the right thing when he cools down. So if you'll just stick around the camp till he quits work this evening I'm sure he'll give you a time-check."

"Do you think it was all right for him to fire me, without giving me a chance to get a pair of gloves, after I came all the way out from St. Paul to work here?" Paul asked.

"Tausig does whatever he thinks is best," Mr. Patterson replied. "It is a fact

that lots of young fellows who come out from St. Paul are no good on the grade."

"Well, as you suggest, I'll stick around." Paul noted again the payroll that the contractor seemed to be having difficulty with. "I could help you with that if you like," he volunteered.

"Could you, now?" Mr. Patterson regarded Paul with new interest.

"Sure. I used to work in an office before I took to railroading."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Why did you quit office work?"

In a few words Paul explained the disaster that followed his act in replying to a newspaper advertisement and his succeeding resolution to do work that seemed more worth while. The contractor gravely considered his statement.

"It just happens that I *am* rather in need of clerical help," he said. "I'm not much of a hand at figures myself, and somehow or other I don't seem to get this payroll right. It amounts to a lot more than I thought it would. Not, of course, that I think there's any crooked work going on in my camp, but— Well, a regular bookkeeper like you ought to be able to tell me what's wrong. Then there's the timekeeping. Tausig does it now, but that's not proper work for a foreman to be doing; he should devote all his time to the actual work."

The thought that Mr. Patterson might take a task of any kind away from Tausig and give it to him kindled in Paul an enthusiasm for bookkeeping that he had never possessed before. Doing clerical work outdoors on the grade, he reflected, would be vastly different from doing it indoors in St. Paul.

"If you want a clerk, I'd certainly like to have the job," he said.

The contractor threw down his pencil and rose to his feet.

"All right," he said. "You're hired. We'll go right out to Tausig now and you can take over his time book."

Paul could scarcely repress his satisfaction as they proceeded to where Tausig was directing, with his usual acrimonious comments, the work of the men under him. The foreman himself was doing no work.

"Tausig," said Mr. Patterson, "I've decided to engage this young man as clerk and timekeeper, so I won't have to bother you with the time book any more. You can tell Monroe how to do it, and he can take over the book right away."

Tausig said nothing for a moment, but stood staring from Paul to his boss as though he had received a rude shock. Finally he spoke.

"All right," he said, "but there's no need to bother about it right now. I'm in the middle of a powder job and I can tell Monroe just as well to-night. Besides, I've taken the time for this afternoon."

Mr. Patterson regarded his foreman with something akin to suspicion. "I'd rather start Monroe on the job right now," he stated.

"All right," Tausig reluctantly consented. "I'll get the time book. It's in my coat pocket."

"What's that in your hip pocket?" The contractor pointed to something that protruded from the rear pocket of the foreman's trousers.

"That? Oh, that's something else."

"Let's see it."

Tausig reluctantly drew forth the book. "Jiminy! It is the time book, after all," he explained. "But it's in no condition to be handed over to a new man. I'll just fix it up—"

Mr. Patterson took it out of his hand.

"If there's any fixing to be done, I'll do it myself." He glanced through the book. "You said you took the time for this afternoon, eh?"

Tausig shook his head. "Not this afternoon, no—this morning."

The owner turned to Paul. "Didn't Tausig say this afternoon?"

"He certainly did," Paul replied.

"All right then. The men on the job should check up with the names in the book. So we'll just see if they do. Since you're green at the job, Monroe, I'll go around with you. You come with us, too, Tausig."

"I was getting ready to shoot some rock," the foreman demurred.

"That can wait. Come on. Now, Monroe, the idea is to get the name of

every man on the job and see if he's entered up properly. As you come to each man, put a check mark after his name in the book. We'll start at this end. Never mind your other work, Tausig."

With the time book in his hand, Paul took a new and very intensive interest in his work. Clerical work it was, to be sure—but how different from toiling over dry-as-dust ledgers in a stuffy office! The fresh air and sunshine, the fact that each and every figure bore a direct relationship to the work that was being done, the feeling that his enemy had some secret reason for alarm over his taking over of the job, the anticipation that drama was about to be enacted before his very eyes, the knowledge that already he was engaged in conflict with the most primitive and brutal man he had ever encountered—all these things gave him an interest in his work that he had never possessed before.

With Patterson and Tausig at his elbow, he checked off the name of each man as he came to him. Then, to make doubly sure that every actual worker was included, he asked each group of men if one of their number was temporarily absent, and when such was the case, he searched for the man or awaited his return. Gradually he worked his way from one end of the job to the other, until there was no possibility that any one had been overlooked.

"Now that you've got everybody, every name in the book ought to have a check-mark against it," said Mr. Patterson. "See if that is the case."

Paul looked. "No, it isn't," he reported. "Here are four names that I didn't check off."

The contractor turned upon his foreman. "How do you account for that, Tausig?" he questioned sharply. "You said you had taken the time for this afternoon."

"He didn't get 'em all," Tausig insisted.

The contractor looked at his foreman and shook his head sadly and thoughtfully.

"Tausig," he said, "I've suspected you for some time, but I never was sure until this minute. You are a liar and a thief. You deliberately entered in the book the names of men who do not exist, so that you could draw pay for them and put it in your

own pocket. That is why my payroll is higher than it ought to be."

Tausig glared at his boss as though he would like to assault him, and Paul prepared for action, but the foreman thought better of it.

"You can't prove nothing," he snarled. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I *could* have you arrested," said Mr. Patterson, "but that would take more time than it's worth. So all I am going to do, Tausig, is to discharge you without a cent of pay—because you've stolen more than is coming to you—and then warn every other contractor on the line as to what kind of man you are."

"When do I have to get out?"

"Now."

"You won't let me finish the day?"

"No."

"And you *will* give me a black eye with every other contractor on the line?"

"Yes."

Tausig smiled evilly. "All right. I'm through. Now let's see if the work can go on without me. I'm betting it can't." He stood grinning at Mr. Patterson as though he were enjoying some secret joke.

CHAPTER IV.

TRAGEDY COMES TO CAMP K.

PATTERSON called one of the men to him, and as the fellow came he explained to Paul that this man was a straw boss, or assistant foreman.

"Mike," he said, "Tausig is leaving the camp this afternoon, so I want you to take charge for the rest of the day."

"All right," Mike agreed. "What's to be done?"

"I was fixin' the powder to shoot some rock," Tausig volunteered.

"And didn't finish the job?"

"No."

Mike looked somewhat alarmed as the four made their way to where the drillers were boring. This was at the top of the rocky hill through which the right-of-way was being cut. As soon as a line of holes were bored, two or three feet back from the edge, they were charged with black

powder, and while the workmen below withdrew to a place of safety, they were exploded and masses of rock crashed down into the man-made cañon below, to be loaded on the dump cars and carried away. It was the foreman's job to charge the holes and explode them, and inasmuch as powder and fuses were used instead of dynamite and electricity, it was comparatively dangerous work.

"As I said before, I was right in the middle of a shootin' job when you called me away," Tausig explained again. "Some of the holes are charged and some ain't."

"You want me to take up his job where he left off, and finish it?" Mike asked Mr. Patterson.

"Yes."

Mike shook his head. "It's dangerous work—takin' over a shootin' job that's half done. How do I know how he charged the holes and laid the fuses?"

Tausig grinned. "Thought you'd want me on the job a while longer," he said.

"You're not much of a straw boss, Mike," said the owner. "You ought to be able to finish the job."

"I can," Mike replied, "but I don't want to. I've seen too many men blown to bits to take any chances."

"I'll do it, Patterson," spoke up Tausig, "if you'll take back what you said about talking to the other contractors on the line."

Mr. Patterson considered this. "No," he said finally. "I owe them a duty. I guess everybody isn't so cowardly as Mike. I'll find somebody—"

Immediately Paul Monroe saw his chance to achieve a standing in his employer's eyes that he might not be able to gain by months of ordinary endeavor. He knew no more about shooting hard rock than a cat knows about high diving, but he was willing to take a chance.

"Let me shoot the rock," he offered.

Immediately Tausig interposed. "Hell, no!" he said. "You'd kill yourself. I'll finish the job since I started it. I guess I'm enough of a sport not to leave a job in the shape that one's in." And, without waiting for the owner's acceptance of his offer, Tausig went to work.

Mr. Patterson started to say something, but did not do so. In silence he and Paul watched the discharged foreman go about the business of charging the remaining holes with powder and attaching fuses to all of them. Paul was a trifle puzzled by Tausig's changed attitude. He wondered if, after all, the man was as bad as he had at first considered him.

Presently Tausig finished fixing the holes and shouted down into the cut for the workmen to get back out of range. They did so, scampering away like scared goats. The ex-foreman ran back to where Paul and the contractor stood and awaited the explosion.

It came presently—not one explosion, as Paul expected, but a series of them as one fuse exploded after another because it was longer or had burned more slowly. The sounds died away and he was about to step forward to look into the cañon where the shattered rock had dropped, when Mr. Patterson grasped his arm.

"Keep back," he warned. "All the holes haven't gone off yet. You've got to be careful, Monroe, till you learn more about this business."

"Must have been a bum fuse," commented Tausig. "'Tain't going to go off."

They waited a while longer until the owner grew impatient.

"We can't stand here all day," he said. "Tell the men to return to work."

"And walk up close to that unexploded hole to do it?" said Tausig. "I guess not."

They waited a while longer. It seemed a long time since the other holes had gone off; it did not seem possible that the remaining one might still explode.

"Tell them now," ordered Mr. Patterson.

"Tell 'em yourself," snapped Tausig. "I've done all I'm going to. I finished my job and I'm through. Since you were so damned quick to bawl Mike out for not wanting to fool with powder, let's see you show a little of that bravery you were talking about. Let's see you investigate that bum hole."

"I'll tell them," said Paul.

But Mr. Patterson pushed Paul back and walked toward the hole himself. Paul

watched his employer as the latter strode toward the ledge of rock that now jutted out into the cañon since the formation on both sides of it had been shot away. Mr. Patterson arrived at the hole and stood almost directly over it. He waved his hand at the men below and shouted: "All right—"

They were the last words that he was destined to speak in this world. With a roar that seemed more tremendous than all the preceding explosions put together, the solid rock beneath his feet broke off and crashed into the cut.

CHAPTER V.

WHO IS THE NEW BOSS?

PAUL and Tausig raced down into the cut, but others had arrived before them, and the body of Mr. Patterson, horribly mangled and quite lifeless, was being carried away.

"Into the office with it!" Tausig commanded. "Monroe, you phone the county coroner first, then headquarters' office. Mike, you take charge of the men while I'm gone. All right, men! The boss is dead and the excitement is all over, but this railroad has to be built just the same. Get busy!"

Paul did as requested, without any thought for the time being as to the authority or lack of it that lay back of Tausig's snappy orders. He suggested to headquarters that they should wire Mr. Patterson's relatives in St. Paul, and was informed that this would be done.

With these duties attended to, he stood about, a bit helplessly, it must be confessed, since Mr. Patterson had not instructed him in his duties beyond the keeping of the time-book for the day. Tausig noticed this.

"Here, Monroe," he said. "Give me that time book and step lively. If you're going to stick around here you're going to earn your keep."

For the first time Paul realized that this man was acting as though he owned the camp.

"I'll not give you the time book," he said. "And, while I'm at it, what business

have you giving orders to anybody? You were fired. You don't belong in this camp any more. You'd better beat it."

Tausig walked up to Paul and stood glaring at him.

"Me fired?" he snarled. "I guess you got your dates mixed, kid. Nobody ever fired me. I was Patterson's foreman, and as such I'm in charge of this camp now that he's a dead one."

The man's brazen assumption of authority and lack of respect for the dead man stung Paul.

"You're a liar, and you know it!" he blazed. "There were witnesses that heard him give you the grand bounce. I'll get them, and then you'd better move on or I'll get the law on your trail."

"Witnesses, eh?" Tausig leered. "Let's see you get 'em."

Furious at this unexpected turn of events, Paul strode out of the office, the time book still in his pocket. He rounded up all the men who had been within earshot during the dead contractor's altercation with Tausig, including Mike, the straw boss, and ordered them to the office. They obeyed without question.

"Now, men," he said, "you heard Mr. Patterson discharge Tausig, didn't you?"

To his amazement, no one replied in the affirmative.

"I heard the boss and the foreman havin' some words, but I didn't hear nothin' about no one gettin' fired," said one of the men.

Paul appealed to Mike. "You heard Mr. Patterson say that he wanted you to take charge of the job because Tausig was going away."

"Going away, yes—but the boss didn't say nothin' about firin' him. I supposed he was goin' to town on business or somethin'."

Tausig's leer spread all over his brutal face.

"Not so smart as you thought you were, eh, kid?" he taunted. "Thought you'd like to run the camp yourself, I suppose. But it happens that I've got the owner's interests at heart, and I ain't a going to let you. I'm a going to run it—and I don't need no timekeeper neither. So if you'll

just hand over that time book and get out peaceable like there won't be no second accidents."

Paul forgot that, as yet, he was probably not a physical match for the gorillalike brute in front of him.

"You'll know you've been in a fight before you get that time book away from me!" he exclaimed. "You were fired for padding the pay roll, and you know it—you thief!"

He whirled upon the other men.

"Mr. Patterson engaged me to act as timekeeper and clerk this afternoon," he said. "He took the time book away from Tausig and gave it to me, and the fact that I've got it proves that I'm telling the truth."

"That's right. I heard the boss say you was to do the timekeeping," spoke up some one.

"So did I," affirmed another. "You're the timekeeper, right enough."

"Good!" cried Paul. "Then I keep the time book. But that isn't all I want to do. This man Tausig was fired by Mr. Patterson just before he died, and I want to get him out of this camp. Are you all quite sure that you can't recollect overhearing something to that effect that the boss said?"

The men scratched their heads and wrinkled their brows, but, as before, their efforts were in vain.

"If you're the timekeeper it looks to me like you're the boss of the camp and you've got a right to fire anybody you like."

Tausig glared at this speaker so fiercely that the man added: "Leastwise, that's what was done in another camp I worked in once."

"I'd like to see any damned timekeeper fire me," sneered Tausig. "In any camp I was ever in, when the owner left the job it was his foreman who ran things. Anyway, that's what's going to happen in this camp."

Tausig strode up to Paul and glared at him.

"Since I'm running this camp, you're fired," he said. "Now give me that book and get to hell outa here."

Paul glared right back.

"Since *I* am the man that's running this camp, *you* are fired for the second time," he said. "Now shut your mouth, you overgrown bully—and *you* get to hell out of here."

For a tense moment the two glared at each other like grizzly bears about to engage in combat, then the tension was relieved by the straw boss.

"The thing to do," said Mike, "is to ask the superintendent of construction to come here and take charge of the camp until the new owner shows up."

"That suits me," said Paul.

Tausig did not assent to this obvious solution of the problem with good grace, but in the end Mike's suggestion was adopted and the request was made by telephone. Superintendent O'Brien promised to come out immediately. In the meantime Mike took the laborers back to the cut and kept them at work.

Mr. O'Brien arrived that evening, and a sort of rough court was assembled in the office. Witnesses were heard on both sides. Paul easily established the fact that he had been engaged as clerk and timekeeper, but when it came to proving that Mr. Patterson had discharged Tausig, that was a different matter.

Several of the men had overheard enough to give them to understand that Tausig would be absent for a few hours, but that was all. Paul explained what Mr. Patterson's reason had been for discharging Tausig, and suggested that the names in the time book should be investigated; but the superintendent demurred at carrying the investigation any further.

"This is not a law court," he said. "I cannot undertake to run down every shred of evidence as a judge would. All I desire is that the work shall proceed for three or four days until the heir of the deceased shall appear—his daughter, I understand—then she can engage or discharge whom she pleases.

"The evidence shows that Mr. Monroe was engaged as timekeeper, and it has failed to show that Mr. Tausig was discharged as foreman. Therefore my decision is that both these men shall remain here until Miss

Patterson arrives—the one in charge of work on the grade, the other in charge of all the clerical work, including timekeeping."

"What about paying off men who may quit before Miss Patterson arrives," Paul asked. "There is no money in the office to pay them—or bills or anything else."

"Send any men who quit to headquarters," said O'Brien. "Also any tradesmen who refuse to be stood off for a few days. But if you're any kind of a clerk you can keep them waiting."

"Your decision doesn't look like a very satisfactory one to me," Paul still demurred. "Neither Tausig nor I are in charge of the camp, and where there's no commander in chief there's likely to be trouble."

"If you two have the interests of the camp at heart I guess you can avoid stepping on each other's toes for three or four days," answered O'Brien. "Then you'll have the commander in chief you want."

"All right," Paul agreed. "I'll certainly do all I can to make things run smoothly."

"Same here," said Tausig.

With peace restored, on the surface at least, the superintendent took his departure.

Next morning the coroner's jury arrived, and, after hearing all the evidence, returned a verdict of accidental death, with no blame attached to any one.

The undertaker then removed the body with the intention of holding it until the arrival of the deceased's daughter, and the camp settled down into its routine again to await the arrival of Miss Patterson. No one knew how old she was, or what she looked like, and there was considerable speculation as to what would occur when she arrived.

CHAPTER VI.

WAS MURDER COMMITTED?

THE following day at Camp K passed without any untoward incident. Tausig attended to his job of blasting out the cut, and Paul Monroe attended to the

timekeeping and other clerical work, and the duties of the two did not conflict. In the evening, however, Paul had an unexpected visitor. He was working late in an effort to master the intricacies of the contracting business, when a knock sounded on the office door and, in reply to his invitation to enter, one of the camp laborers came in.

It was a man to whom Paul had paid rather more than the ordinary amount of attention when he had seen him on the grade, mainly because of the fellow's small stature and perennial expression of good humor. He knew his name—Nixey Reed—but he had no idea what his business could be.

It seemed to be mysterious enough. Nixey first looked carefully around the place to make sure no one else was present, then lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Tausig ain't around here, is he?" he inquired.

"No," said Paul.

"There ain't anybody else around that can overhear what I got to say?"

Again Paul replied in the negative.

"Because Tausig would skin me alive if he ever found out that I told you what I'm going to," Nixey went on.

"What is it?"

"Nothin' but a suspicion, Mr. Monroe, that I thought I'd put you wise to, seein' that I'm with you in your fight against that big gorilla."

"Go ahead," Paul encouraged. "What do you suspect?"

"Well, in the first place, before I talk about suspicions, I wonder do you realize what a devil from hell you went up against when you tackled Tausig?"

"He doesn't look any worse than lots of other brutal foremen I've heard about," Paul replied. "Is there anything particularly devilish about him?"

"I'll say there is," Nixey declared with emphasis. "D'ye know what that fellow did once to a man that talked back to him?"

"What?"

"Beat him up so bad that he didn't leave the hospital for six weeks. That's

why I was tremblin' in my boots when you stood up and defied him. Because if he'd 'a' taken a notion to light onto you, you'd 'a' got the same dose, like as not. You wouldn't have stood a chance—nor any other man in Camp K."

"Sometimes a man has to fight, Nixey, whether he thinks he can win or not."

"I know that. But it ain't only at fightin' that Tausig is a devil. D'ye know what he done once when Mr. Patterson went away for a week and left him in charge?"

"What?"

"Brought a lot of women to the camp, that's what. The worst he could pick up down in Geyser, and if there's worse anywhere on earth I'd like to know where. And after he got done raisin' hell with them, what d'you suppose he done?"

"I don't know."

"Set 'em out on the road and told 'em to get home the best way they knew how. One of them told him what kind of a man she thought he was, and he gave her a lick that knocked her flat just as if she was a man."

"I don't imagine he'll last long in this camp when Miss Patterson gets here," Paul remarked.

"Not if she's got sense, he won't, but how do you know she has? She's a young girl, ain't she?"

"So I understand."

"Sometimes young girls have sense, and sometimes they haven't. But, to get back to where I was first off, has it ever struck you that Tausig might have *planted* that hole to go off like it did?"

Paul was startled.

"You mean you think—" He hesitated to put the dreadful thought into words.

"I do think—yes, sir—that he fixed that hole so it would kill the boss."

"My God!" Paul ejaculated. "What would his object be?"

"To keep from gittin' fired in disgrace."

"But he *was* fired in disgrace."

"Sure—I don't doubt that—but you're the only one that knows about it, and you can't prove it."

Paul considered the matter in silence.

"How could Tausig have fixed the hole to explode as it did?" he asked.

"Easy enough. By attachin' an extra long and slow fuse to it and concealing the extra length down in the hole."

"What makes you think he might have done that?"

"Lots of things. In the first place, it was an extra big explosion, and that shows the hole was packed with an extra big charge of powder. In the second place, he wouldn't go near it himself, though many's the time I've seen him walk up to other holes that didn't explode. In the third place, he wouldn't let you go near it when you wanted to, but just as good as forced Mr. Patterson to go."

"Why wouldn't he want me to get blown up just as much as the boss? He had it in for me even more than for him."

"No, he hadn't. Mr. Patterson could fire him and get him in dutch with every contractor on the line, and you couldn't. Tausig knew right enough that nobody else overheard Patterson say he was fired, and therefore you couldn't prove that he had been."

"It seems incredible, Nixey, that he would want to murder his employer for such a little thing as discharging him and threatening to tell other contractors about his dishonesty, especially when Mr. Patterson made it plain that he didn't intend to put him in jail."

"You're forgetting, Mr. Monroe, what's going to happen here in a day or two."

"What?"

"A girl is comin' to take charge."

"You mean that Tausig thinks she may keep him on the job?"

"He thinks a lot more than that, mark my word. For all his rough ways, Tausig is a ladies' man, or thinks he is, and if he ain't takin' a shine to Miss Patterson ten minutes after she puts her foot in this camp I'll miss my guess."

"What?" exclaimed Paul. "A nice girl—after bringing a lot of Honky-Tonk women to the camp! Why, Nixey, the man wouldn't have the nerve!"

"Wait and see. You don't know Tausig like I do."

Paul brought his fist down on his desk,

"I swear to God, Nixey, that he'll not put anything like that across!"

"Not if you can help it—of course not—or if any other decent man can. But maybe you can't. And everybody else is too scared of Tausig to interfere—even me, that has to come sneaking to you like this."

Paul rose and strode up and down the office. He did not know Miss Patterson, who had inherited the outfit, but he did know that she was the daughter of the man who had befriended him, and he took a silent oath to protect her.

"Thanks, Nixey," he said. "I'll remember what you say about the explosion, though for the life of me I can't make up my mind that you are right. It seems too incredible. And I'll watch out for Miss Patterson, never fear."

"All right, boss. Is there a side door where you can let me out without that man seeing me?"

There was, and Nixey made his exit through it.

Next day Tausig came to Paul, and, in a manner so friendly that it might have been disarming had it not been for Nixey Reed's warning, suggested that they should build a separate shack for Miss Patterson to occupy when she arrived.

"Of course," Paul acquiesced. "We've got to fix up quarters of some kind for her. But is it necessary to build a separate shack? Wouldn't an extension on the office building do all right? It would be cheaper, and so far as I can see would answer her purpose just as well."

"I think she'd rather have a separate building," Tausig maintained.

Paul Monroe was not the man to oppose any project merely because he disliked the projector, so after a moment's thought he acquiesced.

"That's the way to talk," said the foreman. "We'll have a regular happy family around here yet."

He grinned as he went out in a way that caused Paul to grow angry again as he reflected on the possible hidden meaning behind Tausig's words.

He had an uneasy feeling also that, in consenting to Tausig's proposition of a sep-

arate dwelling for the new owner, he was in some way piling up trouble for himself.

CHAPTER VII.

A LADY TAKES CHARGE.

ETHEL PATTERSON did not appear at Camp K until after her father's funeral had taken place. Paul was surprised when he saw her. In the first place, he had never seen a prettier or more becomingly dressed girl back in St. Paul, let alone in Montana; and in the second place, she did not appear to be the helpless young person he had somehow anticipated. She knew nothing whatever about the railroad contracting business, true enough, but she was self-reliant and intelligent, and it was quickly apparent that, once she learned the ropes, she would not be compelled to rely upon anybody.

Paul was surprised again when he saw Tausig on the day of Ethel's arrival. Heretofore the foreman had represented the limit of personal neglect and uncouthness; but now he was clean shaven and dressed not unbecomingly in new working garments. He quickly proved that he was capable of conversing with a lady when he had a mind to, and, as he and Paul showed Ethel around the camp, Paul was not a little nettled to discover that Tausig was making a good impression on her.

"Here is the cabin that I insisted should be built for you," Tausig told her. "Monroe said it wasn't necessary—that a little lean-to against the office would serve you just as well—but I hope I have more consideration for a lady than that."

"It was very thoughtful of you, I'm sure," said Ethel.

"I was only thinking of the extra expense, of course, and the fact that you might wish to be close to your office," Paul said.

The three sauntered down to the rock cut, and again Paul was placed at a disadvantage because he was not so well acquainted with the work as was the foreman. Tausig explained the technique of blasting out rock at great length, and with a flow of language that scarcely permitted Paul to

get in a word edgewise. It was only too plain that, for the time being at least, he was playing second fiddle.

His turn came, however, when Ethel returned to the office and Tausig was perforce compelled to leave her and go back to the cut, which he did with evident reluctance and not before Ethel had thanked him warmly for his pains in showing her about. Paul had by this time thoroughly mastered the details of the office work. He had prepared a full and complete statement of the financial condition of the camp, with an inventory of the assets and a list of the liabilities, and these he now explained to the new proprietor.

"Not very satisfactory, is it?" Ethel commented.

"Far from it," Paul agreed. "Now perhaps you know why I wasn't anxious to incur the expense of building you a separate cabin."

"I wonder why things aren't in better shape?" Ethel inquired. "Father always made money before—not a great deal, of course, because if he had, or if he had left any insurance, I would sell out and not bother to keep on with the contracting business."

Paul hesitated. Considering the apparently good impression that Tausig had made on her, he did not quite know how to go about the business of telling her that the man had padded the pay roll.

"For one thing, this has been a bad season," he told her. "Rain has interfered with the work a lot. Then there was considerable expense involved in moving the outfit from the nearest railroad." He paused. "On top of all that, there was the fact that Mr. Patterson was the victim of a thief right here in the camp."

"A thief?" Ethel was startled. "Who?"

"Before I give you his name I'd like to tell you just how I came to get this job as timekeeper," Paul began.

He said nothing about his conflict with Tausig when he first entered the camp, but started with his entrance into the office to find Mr. Patterson puzzling over his pay-roll.

"Your father seemed to suspect that something was wrong, so he engaged me to

keep the time and attend to the other clerical work," Paul stated. "Then we went out to the grade together to take over the time book from the man who was then keeping it. This man did not want to give it up, but your father grabbed it away from him and we checked it up together. To his surprise and mine, there were four names in the book that should not have been there, because there were no men in camp to answer to them, though the foreman had said that he had seen them at work only a few moments previously. In other words, he added four fictitious names so he could draw pay for them and put it in his own pocket."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Ethel. "Did father discharge that foreman immediately?"

"He certainly did."

"Well, let's be thankful for that."

"But after your father's death, I am sorry to say, the man claimed he had not been discharged. I was unable to prove that he had been, and after an investigation, the superintendent of construction decided that he should remain until you came."

"Then he's here now?"

"Yes."

Ethel rose to her feet. "Well, he won't be very long. Who is he?"

"The foreman."

"You mean Mr. Tausig?"

"Yes."

She sat down again. "Well! That's news. Are you sure you aren't mistaken?"

"Positive."

"That nice man who just showed me around the camp is a thief? I can't believe it."

"It's a fact, just the same."

"Well!" She was silent for a moment.

"You say that you cannot prove that father discharged Mr. Tausig?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"And Mr. Tausig claims he wasn't discharged?"

"Naturally."

"Then, how am I to know which one of you is telling the truth?"

It was a question that staggered Paul. "I have the time book here," he said.

"You can see for yourself the names that

were not checked off the day your father died."

Ethel examined the book. "You could scarcely convict a man on that evidence," she said. "Send somebody out to Mr. Tausig and tell him to come here," she instructed. "Then, while we're waiting for him, tell me about the accident in which father lost his life."

Paul sent a man after Tausig and started to relate the incidents leading up to the fatal explosion. He was careful not to mention Nixey Reed's suspicion that Tausig might deliberately have planned it. Black-hearted as he knew the foreman to be, he still was unwilling to believe that he was quite so black as that.

"Did any one besides you hear Mr. Tausig decline to go forward and examine the hole that apparently was not going to explode?" she asked.

"No one but your father," Paul replied.

"Then, if Mr. Tausig denies having said that, as he denied having padded the time book, who am I to believe?"

Paul felt uncomfortable again. Then suddenly he saw the light. "You know that I speak the truth because your father *did* go to the hole," he said.

Ethel made no reply, and in another moment the foreman arrived.

"What about those names in the time book, Mr. Tausig?" the businesslike young proprietor asked, indicating as she did so the unchecked names.

"They were working that day just like I said they were," the foreman replied.

"Then how is it that dad and Mr. Monroe were unable to locate them?"

"Well, they didn't look well enough, I guess. Chances are the men were hidden behind a bowlder or something."

"Where are those men now?"

For a second or two Tausig hesitated. "They quit," he stated at last.

"When?"

"Yesterday or the day before."

She turned to Paul. "Do your books show that those men were paid off yesterday or the day before?" she queried.

"They certainly do not. Nobody has quit since your father's death."

"How do you account for that, Tausig?"

It was significant to Paul that Ethel addressed the foreman by his last name only.

Tausig flushed and fidgeted.

"I—I guess they mean to come back for their pay," he stammered.

"Nonsense!" said Ethel. "I don't know much about railroad construction, but I do know that no laborer ever quits without drawing his pay." She rose to her feet, and Paul marveled that a dainty little girl of her comparatively tender years—she was scarcely more than a schoolgirl—could possess the poise and will power that she now exhibited. "Mr. Tausig," she stated calmly, "I do not need you here any longer. Mr. Monroe will pay you off."

Paul had also risen. Tausig had abandoned his rôle of courtier and now stood glaring at his accusers.

"Tausig has nothing coming," Paul said. "Mr. Patterson said he had stolen more than he earned."

"You hear that, Tausig?" said Ethel. "I think you had better get out."

The deposed foreman stood, his fingers clenched, the muscles of his jaw standing out.

"Mr. Patterson also desired that the other contractors along the B. and N. should be notified of his dishonesty," Paul stated.

"We'll do that," said Ethel.

Tausig took a quick step toward Paul and stood quivering in anger.

"I'll get you yet, damn you!" he hissed. "Just let me catch you down in the village once." He stood glaring for a moment longer, then suddenly flung out of the office, and a few minutes later they saw him striding savagely down the right-of-way.

"Now," said the new boss of Camp K, turning to Paul, "you may take charge of the work as foreman and I will attend to the timekeeping and other clerical details."

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

IT was with a feeling of consternation that Paul Monroe heard this latest order of his new and charming boss. Take charge of the work as foreman! She had taken

it for granted that he knew all about such work.

But he did not. He knew practically nothing about the business of blasting a railroad right-of-way through a long, high hill that was composed almost entirely of rock. It was less than a week since he had seen a construction camp for the first time, and since then his time had been so thoroughly taken up by his endeavor to get the accounting end of the business into shape that he had paid almost no attention to what was going on outside. He knew that pitching rock into a dump car was desperately hard work and that Camp K was behind with its allotment of grading, but beyond that his ignorance of the job was profound.

But he realized in an instant that it would not do to confess his ignorance. This charming and competent girl looked up to him as a practical railroad man, and since she did so it was up to him to make good in the unfamiliar rôle. Her good opinion of him was too precious to be thrown away if he could possibly avoid it. In his extremity he thought of Nixey Reed, who had warned him against Tausig, and late that night, after Ethel Patterson had retired to her cabin, he called Nixey into the office.

"Nixey," he said, "I'm up against it. Miss Patterson has made me foreman and I don't know any more about bossing a gang of hard-rock men than an elephant knows about walking a tight rope. But I'm not going to tell her that. She thinks I can make good, and, by George, I am going to make good! Now, it strikes me that you have worked on the grade for quite a while and ought to know considerable about it, so I'm going to ask you if you can't put me wise to the game of bossing a bunch of hard nuts like yourself."

Nixey was delighted at this mark of confidence in him.

"Boss, I sure can put you wise," he said. And forthwith he proceeded to do so.

"It ain't the hard guys like Tausig that get the most work out of the men," he explained. "Men work for a boss like that when his eye is on them, but the minute his back is turned they let up. But take a foreman who really shows an interest in his

men, who gives 'em a cheerful word now and then, who looks after 'em when they're sick—then you've got the man who gets real work out of his gang. Not that he should be an easy mark—they'd spot that in a minute and then they'd loaf—but there's such a thing as being a pusher and a good guy, too, and when you see a foreman like that you see one who gets the most out of his men."

Paul asked dozens of questions about the technical side of the work—how powder should be stored, and rammed into the holes made by the drillers, and shot, and so on; how the engineers' instructions should be carried out; how the dinky engines and cars were operated—and put most of the replies down in a notebook.

Not content with this cross-examination, Paul dragged Nixey out of bed next morning at daybreak—long before the hour to start work—and together they went over every foot of the Patterson contract. There were many things that Nixey did not know, of course, but he was smarter than he looked, and might have risen to the position of foreman himself had he possessed more will power and less thirst for liquor, so that when Paul's survey of the situation was completed he felt that he could at least make a good bluff at bossing the job until he had a chance to learn by actual experience.

"What have you done about the tip I gave you that Tausig caused Mr. Patterson's death?" Nixey asked him.

"Nothing," answered Paul. "What could I do? You had no evidence."

"Maybe not," Nixey admitted, "but I know he did it just the same, and some day, if I get the chance, I'm going to nail it on him."

"Maybe you will get the chance," Paul replied. "Tausig says he isn't through with me yet—dared me to show my face in the village, in fact."

"Are you going to?"

"If I have business there, yes. But not otherwise. I'm not looking for trouble."

Paul's first act, when the working day began, was to reward Nixey for his assistance by promoting him to a less arduous job as brakeman of the dump train. Then,

with Mike still acting as straw boss under him, he undertook his impersonation of a competent foreman.

He managed to get by during the first day without mishap, and on the second day he really knew something about the job. On the third day he discovered that he partially made up in executive ability what he lacked in practical experience, and on the fourth he did not doubt that soon he would be able to master his outdoor duties as well as he had his indoor ones.

It was on the evening of the fourth day that Ethel called him into the office and handed him a letter that she had received.

"What do you know about that?" she asked.

Paul read it slowly and wonderingly. It was from a legal firm in the city of Great Falls, was addressed to her father and read as follows:

Replying to your favor of recent date, we are inclosing under separate cover the rules and regulations covering the recording of mining claims. We consider that, inasmuch as you did not know how to record your claim, you made a wise move when you painted the exposed seam of ore to resemble ordinary rock. If we can be of further service, kindly advise us.

"Jiminy!" exclaimed Paul. "That looks like your father ran on to a mining claim, doesn't it?"

"Yes. Have you heard anything about it?"

"Not a word."

"I wonder where it is situated?"

"Haven't the slightest idea."

"Would any of the men know?"

"Perhaps. I'll send for Nixey Reed. If anybody knows, he does."

The laborer who had been of such assistance to Paul appeared presently.

"Nixey," the new foreman asked, "have you ever heard any of the men speak of a mining claim that Mr. Patterson discovered?"

Nixey was startled. "Gosh, no!" he answered.

"I suppose you would if anybody did?"

"I sure would. There isn't much goes on that gets by me. Why? Did Mr. Patterson run on to a mine?"

"We don't know for sure."

"It wouldn't be so very surprising if he did," Nixey averred. "All the district hereabouts was supposed to be a mining country once. It was prospected to a fare-you-well back in the sixties and seventies, and some mines were opened up, too, but they petered out in time and no one expects to find pay ore around here now. But that's no reason it couldn't be found—especially when you go digging right through hills like we are."

A new thought came to Paul, but he refrained from discussing it with Ethel while a third person was present.

"All right, Nixey," he said. "Don't mention this to anybody, but if any of the men ever get to talking about mines try and find out what they know, will you?"

"Sure," said Nixey, and took his departure.

"I'll bet I know where the seam of ore is," Paul told Ethel then. "It was uncovered by the blasting and it is somewhere along the sides of the cut. We can find it if we search carefully."

"It would probably take a lot of searching, considering that it is concealed by a coat of paint," Ethel averred.

"And we're so far behind with the contracting that we haven't much time for mining," Paul admitted.

"The thing to do," Ethel decided, "is to write to these lawyers and ask them to send us a copy of the letter dad wrote them. Until I hear from them, I'm going to forget about the mine and rush the work."

"Right-o," said Paul.

CHAPTER IX.

BARE FISTS.

A FEW days later Paul and Ethel were checking bills in the office when the latter made a somewhat startling statement.

"Paul" she said, "all my life I've read about tough Montana towns, but I've never seen one. Now I understand that Geyser is just about as tough a place as I ever read about, so I've made up my mind that

I'm going down there some evening, when every resort is running wide open, and I'm going to see everything there is to be seen."

"Great Scott, Ethel, you can't do that!" Paul exclaimed. "You have no idea what kind of a place Geyser is. A post office, two general stores, a livery stable and *sixteen* saloons and dance halls—that's Geyser."

"Sixteen!" Ethel smiled happily. "That's better than I thought. And they're tough, aren't they? Really, truly tough—drinking and gambling and everything—just as tough as they used to be back in the old frontier days?"

"Every bit. There's hardly a night that some poor devil isn't slugged and robbed; hardly ever a week during which some one isn't killed."

"Then I'm in luck, am I not? Because pretty soon, with prohibition and reform being discussed so much everywhere, tough towns will be a thing of the past and people will have to just read about them, not see them with their own eyes."

"If you're wise, I think you'll be content merely to read about Geyser," Paul advised.

"Why? Would anybody dare molest me?"

"I'm afraid they might. When a person—any person—enters a den such as the Honky-Tonk, for instance, that person puts himself on a level with the other people congregated there. Being a woman, you would attract attention immediately. Any of our men who happened to be present would recognize you, but other men, I fear, would be apt to consider you in the same class with the other women that are to be found there, and you know what kind they are."

"I think you're needlessly alarmed," said Ethel. "Any one can distinguish a visitor from an inmate. Besides, I don't intend to go alone."

"May I ask who the lucky escort is to be?"

"I haven't decided as yet."

"You know, Ethel, that if you *must* go, I'd be only too delighted to accompany you."

Ethel considered his offer in silence. "Thanks ever so much, Paul," she said,

"but really I don't think I ought to accept your offer."

Paul experienced a little pang. "Why not?" he queried.

"Because of Tausig. You remember his last words when he left this office, don't you? That if he ever caught you down in the village he'd do all kinds of terrible things to you?"

Paul made a gesture of vexation. "Do you think *that* is why I'm not anxious to go? Do you think I'm afraid of Tausig?"

"All I know is that you're trying to discourage me."

"On your own account, yes. But if you *must* take a chance on getting into trouble, all right. I'm ready to start any evening."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"All right. Don't forget."

There was not much chance that Paul would. All next day he worried about possible insults that he might not be able to save Ethel from, but when evening came he was all keyed up for his escorting task and just as anxious to go through with the adventure as was his fair employer.

They drove four miles to Geyser in the camp buggy and Paul put it up at the lively stable.

"Let's go to one of the smaller resorts first and gradually work up to the biggest," Paul suggested, in the hope that Ethel would see enough in a comparatively tame place to make her disgusted with her project.

"No; let's go, straight to the Honky-Tonk," she vetoed promptly.

This was the biggest of the Geyser saloons and the most brazen in its defiance of law, order and common decency. It was a huge, one-story affair, built hastily to prey on the railroad workers, with brilliant lights in front and the sound of music coming through its open doors.

Paul and Ethel entered and took a seat at one of the little tables just inside the door. A waiter came and Paul ordered wine.

It was early in the evening and the place was not so crowded as it would be later on. The huge floor was covered with sawdust. A bar extended down the side. Beyond the

tables there was a cleared space for dancing, and beyond that a stage on which some bedizened women were dancing and cracking vulgar jokes. Presently they ceased their efforts to entertain and came down from the stage and danced with the men, then sat down with their partners at the tables and ordered drinks.

For a quarter of an hour or more Ethel was satisfied to sit at her corner table and view the pageant. Beyond a few casual glances, no attention was paid to her and Paul. Finally she grew impatient.

"What about the gambling I've heard so much about?" she asked Paul. "I don't see any."

"Have you noticed that alcove to the right, down near the stage?" Paul replied. "Well, it's in there that the roulette wheel is, and the blackjack games and so on."

"Let's take a look at it."

She rose as she spoke, and Paul had no choice but to follow her.

They attracted more attention now as they made their way into the center of the gathering, and Paul felt his anger rising as various men leered at his fair companion.

Ethel was attracted immediately to the roulette wheel.

"This is fine!" she whispered to Paul. "Just like motion-pictures I've seen of Monte Carlo. How do you play it?"

Paul explained and Ethel drew some coins from her bag. She placed a dollar on red and won, then played a column of numbers and lost. Then she tried a long shot by placing another half dollar on one number only. The ball rode on the partition that separated this number from the next one for two whole turns of the wheel, then dropped into the wrong compartment.

"Hard luck, little girl, hard luck!"

Both Paul and Ethel whirled around to see who had addressed her thus familiarly, and Paul stiffened as he recognized Tausig.

The ex-foreman was no longer dressed to attract feminine eyes. His face was covered with a dirty beard, his attire was as uncouth as it had been when Paul first sighted him on the grade.

Ethel shrank from him slightly until she realized what she was doing, then she stood still and looked Tausig straight in the eye.

Paul moved up until he stood close at Ethel's side, and also facing Tausig.

"What you lookin' at me like that for, you lil' peach? I ain't never done you no harm, though you did fire me for nothin'." Tausig was pushing his bearded face closer and closer to Ethel's, a leer on his ugly features.

Paul halted Tausig by clutching his arm.

"Don't you see that Miss Patterson doesn't want to talk to you?" he said sharply.

Tausig transferred his attention to Paul.

"Oh, it's you, is it, you good-for-nothin' pen-pusher?" he snarled. "I've got a bone to pick with you. You're the smart Aleck that got me fired, ain't yeh?"

Paul did not release his hold on Tausig's arm.

"You'd better wait till you're sober before you talk to me," he warned.

"Sober? Who says I ain't sober? I'm sober enough to wipe up the floor with you, you imitation railroader."

Tausig tore away and stood, slightly crouched, his fingers flexing, as though preparing for a spring.

"Give 'em room! Go to it, huskies! Sick 'em, Tigel!" Men and women formed a rude circle around the disputants.

Paul glanced around to see if Ethel was still there, and as he did so the girl stepped forward.

"I wish you men wouldn't fight," she said.

"T' hell wit' your wishes," snarled Tausig, and made a lunge past her at Paul.

Paul was prepared. From the corner of his eye he saw that Ethel had stepped back into the circle of spectators, so he transferred his attention solely to Tausig. He already had his hands in position to strike, so as the ex-foreman lunged forward he slashed out with a right swing that landed flush on Tausig's jaw and sent him staggering.

But Tausig was too tough to be downed by one blow. On he came again, and this time Paul was unable to keep clear of him. Tausig clutched and wrestled him, and they fell to the floor. Over and over they rolled, first one on top and then the other.

For the first time in his life Paul Monroe fought a real fight. He forgot that Tausig was bigger and probably in better condition, forgot that he knew nothing of rough-and-tumble conflict, forgot Ethel even in his desperate endeavor to inflict injury and avoid it himself.

The combatants shook themselves free of each other and rose to their feet, then clashed and again rolled on the floor.

To Paul's great surprise, his opponent suddenly went as limp as a rag, and he realized that the fight was over. He rose and stepped to Ethel's side. Spectators dragged Tausig to his feet and assisted him toward the bar. Paul saw that the man was not seriously injured, then he clutched Ethel's arm, and in a more masterful manner than he had ever used toward any woman before, he said: "Let's get out of here."

Ethel made no objection and in a few moments they found themselves at the livery stable.

"Did you get all the adventure you wanted?" Paul asked.

"Yes—and I wouldn't have missed it for worlds," replied the fair boss of Camp K.

CHAPTER X.

TAUSIG COMES BACK.

NEXT day Ethel called Paul into her office and showed him a letter from the legal firm in Great Falls. Along with it was enclosed the letter which Mr. Patterson had written to them. Her father's epistle merely asked for instructions in regard to filing a claim to cover an outcropping of ore which no one else knew anything about, so far as he was aware, and which was hidden from any casual observer by means of a coat of paint. The lawyers were sorry to have to state that they knew nothing further in regard to the matter.

"Well, the seam of ore your father speaks of is probably lying around here somewhere, but we haven't time to bother looking for it now," Paul remarked. "We're too far behind with the work, as it is."

"We can look for it, though, after the contract is finished, can't we?"

"We surely can." Paul experienced a little thrill at the thought that his intimate relations with his employer might be prolonged beyond the termination of the work on the grade.

"About the work being behind—it's not so far behind now as it was, is it?" Ethel inquired.

"No, thanks to you. I tell you, Ethel, it takes you to show the world what a modern, up-to-date girl can accomplish. The way you've had the men and equipment and supplies rushed here has been an eye-opener to some of the old mossbacks who still argue that woman's place is in the home."

"Nonsense, Paul! You know the credit belongs to you just as much as to me, because what good would equipment and supplies do if I didn't have a foreman who knew how to make the best use of them?"

It was a fact that Paul had more than made good on the job. On numerous occasions his lack of knowledge had embarrassed him, and even yet there were times when he had to call on one or another of his men for advice, but early in the game he had learned that driving power is a good substitute for experience, and on the whole, he had no cause to feel ashamed of his record. The work was now proceeding faster than it ever had under Tausig, and Paul did not doubt that, with good luck, he would be able to complete the Patterson contract on time. Better yet, the weekly operations showed a substantial profit.

It was a never-ending marvel to him that a girl such as Ethel should prove such a competent manager. She must certainly be still in her teens, and in appearance she was nothing more than a flapper whose skirts were almost scandalously short. Nevertheless, there she was, making good where her father had failed, an amazing thing to old-timers who had been moving dirt before she was born.

Operations were proceeding in this satisfactory manner when one day about a week later Paul was surprised to find a load of new lumber dumped on the ground just outside the camp office. He went in-

side to ask Ethel about it. But she spoke first.

"Hello, Paul!" she said. "Why did you order the load of lumber?"

"I didn't," Paul replied. "What did you order it for?"

"I never ordered a stick of lumber in my life." She walked out to the pile of boards. "Queer, isn't it?"

"I'll say so. Must be a mistake. Some teamster left it at this camp when he should have left it at another. Hello! Here's another load coming. I'll ask the driver."

Paul did so.

"All I know is that I was told to dump the lumber right here," the man said.

"Beside the Patterson office?" Paul questioned.

"Exactly."

"But we didn't order it."

"Don't know anything about that. Orders is orders." The driver began to unload his boards beside the first consignment.

"I wonder if headquarters are making us a present of it—but that's a ridiculous supposition." Paul turned from Ethel to the driver. "You spoke of orders. Do you know who ordered this lumber sent here?"

"Come to think of it, I believe I've got the name somewhere." The driver thumbed through his papers. "Yes, here it is, on the bill. Can't make it out very well. Tau—Tau—Tausic or something like that."

Paul and Ethel exchanged significant glances.

"For the love of Pete!" the former ejaculated. "What can be the man's idea?"

"The nerve of him!" echoed Ethel. "Dumping his lumber right down here beside my office on my ground. It is my ground, isn't it?"

"Yes—in a way. It really belongs to the B. and N., I suppose. But even if he did get permission from the railroad to dump his lumber here—and it's almost impossible to believe that he did—I can't for the life of me see what his object can be."

"Unless he means to annoy me by living next door to my office," Ethel suggested.

"That can't be it, because he knows very well that I won't let him annoy you."

Also if that were his object, I should think he would want to build next to your cabin, not next to your office."

"He'll probably show up soon, and then we can find out," said Ethel, and for the time being the subject was dropped.

It came up again, however, with the arrival of Tausig that evening.

The mah had evidently recovered, both mentally and physically, from the drubbing that Paul had given him in the Honky-Tonk saloon and dance-hall. He was spruced up again—clean-shaven and attired in clean clothes. He was cheerful, too; quite jovial, in fact, as though he had fallen heir to some rare good fortune.

"How d'ye do, folks," he sang out. "Pleased t' see me back again, ain't you? Knew you would be. And I'm here for keeps this time, too."

"By what right?" asked Paul, stepping up to the intruder and preparing for action again, as he had at the Honky-Tonk.

"By right of ownership," proclaimed Tausig.

"I don't understand that. This strip of land is owned by the Billings and Northern Railroad. Did the railroad give it to you?"

"No."

"Then where does your right of ownership come in, since the railroad owns it?"

"The railroad doesn't own it—not all of it. The United States Government owns the rest."

"I don't get you," said Paul. "What interest has the government in it?"

Tausig's grin spread all over his ugly face.

"The government still has the *mining* interest in it," he said.

"Oh!" ejaculated Ethel.

Paul said nothing. He realized that Tausig was right. In this section of Montana the government had never surrendered possession of the mineral rights underlying the ground. They could be leased by any one, subject to certain rigid regulations.

"So you filed on the mineral rights hereabouts, eh, Tausig?" he queried.

"You said it. And this is where I aim to build my cabin; right where I dumped this lumber." He grinned at Ethel. "Sorry I couldn't build it closer to you,

Miss Patterson. I like company, I do—yours in particular. But the boundary of my claim ends here, so what could a poor man do?"

"You're closer than Miss Patterson or any one else wants you," said Paul. "And furthermore, you can't get away with that talk about filing a mineral claim without showing something to prove it. Let's see your papers."

Tausig produced them.

"All in order, I guess," Paul commented. "What makes you think you can find minerals on your claim?"

"I've got specimens of the ore."

"Where did you get them?"

"Out of a seam that was opened up when the rock cut was being blasted through the hill."

Paul and Ethel exchanged significant glances. The same thought had occurred to both—her father's letter in which he stated that *he* had uncovered an ore seam.

"Why is it that no one else got wise to that seam?" Paul questioned.

"Because I was too foxy for them," Tausig replied. "I daubed it over with paint, so it looks just like all the rest of the rock."

"All right, Tausig; you can stay." Paul and Ethel went into the office then.

"You see?" said Paul. "It wasn't this devil that found the seam at all. Your father found it and painted it and wrote to the Great Falls lawyers about it. But Tausig got wise somehow and beat your father to the recording office."

"Yes—but I'll venture to say that he got there first only because father died," said Ethel.

Suddenly an ugly thought came to Paul. Heretofore he had rejected Nixey Reed's suggestion that Tausig had murdered Mr. Patterson. But, in the light of this new development, might there not be something in Nixey's theory? Having learned about the mine, would it not be to Tausig's interest to get possession of it for himself by putting its discoverer out of the way?

Paul said nothing to Ethel about this, but as he lay in bed that night he did some serious thinking. Aside from the question of whether murder had been committed,

there remained the fact that Tausig was in possession of a mine that rightfully belonged to Ethel Patterson. He must recover it for her if possible, but how?"

CHAPTER XI.

MINING EXCITEMENT AND ITS EFFECT.

FOR the time being, however, Paul could not afford to give much thought to the subject of mining. Grading operations were proceeding satisfactorily, but he could not afford to relax his efforts in that direction for a single day. There was a time limit on the completion of the Patterson contract and he was still confronted with the problem of making up the time that had been lost by a bad start. His employer was making money, but she might easily lose it all, and more, if she were compelled, by the terms of her contract, to pay a forfeit for any extra time that might be required to complete the job. A heavy forfeit would, in fact, bankrupt her, because every cent she possessed was tied up in the contract.

An ordinary railroad contract may be hurried by the employment of extra men, but in Ethel Patterson's case this could not be done. In the first place, her equipment was limited, and in the second, the confines of the rock cut were so small that only a certain number of men could be used to advantage, and this number was already engaged.

These men were good workers. Paul had weeded out the inefficient ones and carefully replaced them, and he and Ethel had made living conditions so attractive for the present force that he hoped to keep them to the end. Any contingency that might cause even a few of them to quit the job might be disastrous. It was, therefore, with a feeling of genuine alarm that he faced the possibility of having any of them desert.

It was Tausig who started the trouble. A few days after his arrival the ex-foreman lounged into the office while Paul was discussing the work with Ethel, and after favoring both with a triumphant grin, placed both his elbows on the counter and leaned over it as though he felt very much at home.

"How about selling me some supplies?" he questioned. "It's a long way to the stores in Geyser, and you folks have everything I need."

"I might," said Ethel, "were it not for the fact that you stole that mine from me."

"Stole it from you?" Tausig laughed. "How do you get that way, little girl?"

"No familiarity," Paul warned, and Tausig's grin was replaced by a frown.

"It was father who discovered that ledge of ore that you filed on. That letter proves it." And she showed Tausig the communication that Mr. Patterson had addressed to the law firm in Great Falls.

Tausig betrayed the fact that he was a bit startled. He glared at Ethel as he returned the letter.

"He didn't discover it; it was me," he declared.

"I believe you are a thief," said Ethel, "and that's the reason I'll not sell you one single article."

"Maybe you'll be sorry you said that, young lady," growled Tausig as he went out the door.

That afternoon Paul spied Tausig snooping around the cut and talking to his workmen. He walked up to him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"What the hell business is it of yours?" snarled the ex-foreman. "Can't a man walk over his own mining claim?"

"Yes," Paul replied, "but he can't interfere with my men and keep them from their work by talking to them if I can help it, and I think I can. Where is your confounded mining claim, anyhow?"

"You'll find my stakes if you want to look around. Most of this cut is included."

"And where is your ore?"

"I'm going to uncover it right now. If you want to see it, come along. Everybody's invited."

"Is that what you've been telling the men?"

"Yes."

"Trying to get them to lay down their tools to look at what you call your mine, eh?"

"They'll look at it good and plenty before long."

"If they do, it'll not be during working

hours. They've got too much to do. And so have I."

Tausig proceeded alone to a point where the cut was already completed and ready for track-laying, and commenced to climb up the rough, rocky side. Some fifteen feet up he paused and commenced to rub the rock with a rag which he had saturated with paint-removing fluid that he carried in a can.

To his chagrin, Paul saw that Tausig's operations had the effect of slowing up the work. The man's story had spread around and caused more or less excitement, as the discovery of any kind of a mine anywhere on earth always does. The workmen who were directly under Paul's eye now went through the motions of being busily engaged, but it was plain that their minds were not on their jobs. Those who were not under his eye frankly discontinued operations and watched Tausig as spectators might watch a circus performer.

Presently Tausig climbed down, and as he passed various groups of workmen on his way back to his shack Paul could hear him advising them to take a look at his mine. Paul realized the futility of ordering them not to do so. He could prevent them from looking, and he did, but after work they flocked down into the cut.

Paul went there, too. What he saw was a dark-brown streak on the surface of the rock, some three or four feet long and about a foot wide. The men informed him that Tausig claimed it was copper ore.

"Worth a million dollars!" cried one enthusiastic fellow.

"Worth a million fiddle sticks," said another. "There's no real bodies of ore left in this section. This whole district is an old mining region, remember, and all the ore that is worth anything was taken out long ago."

Opinion was divided as to the merits of Tausig's claim, but it was evident that a majority of the men were growing more and more excited about it.

Paul ate supper with Ethel as usual, and as they left the cook shack they encountered Tausig.

"Changed your mind yet about selling me supplies?" he asked Ethel.

"No," she replied shortly.

"All right, then. The war is on. And don't blame it on me, remember. You brought it on yourself."

"Brought what?"

"Wait and see," said the ex-foreman, and with an ugly leer he proceeded on his way.

"What does he mean by that?" Ethel asked Paul.

"I don't know," replied the latter. "What I do know, though, is that he is having a bad effect on the men. Some of them think he's got a fortune. Maybe he has."

"A fortune that should be mine."

"Yes. I'll look into that later on, never fear. But the point right now is that the men are getting so excited over that cursed ledge of ore that they're not taking the same interest in their work that they used to take. I'm afraid that something has got to be done about it. We've got only two more weeks to finish the contract in, remember. Even at the rate we were going we would not finish with more than a day or two to spare. If any let-up in the work takes place I'm afraid you may have to pay a forfeit."

"I can't do that," cried Ethel. "I'd be bankrupt in no time."

"I know that. But don't worry. There won't be any let-up if I can help it. I think we'll finish all right. The men are good men. In a day or so, when they've got this mining excitement out of their systems, they'll work just as hard as ever."

"I'd like to see the ore ledge," said Ethel, and Paul and she made their way down into the cut.

They climbed up to it, but without very satisfactory results. Traces of copper showed, but neither possessed sufficient knowledge of ores to determine whether it was a valuable find or not. Presently they retraced their steps.

As they came in sight of the office both stopped suddenly, startled by the sight that met their eyes, then hurried forward.

Outside of Tausig's shack all the men in the camp were gathered. Tausig himself was mounted on a soap box and was haranguing them like a street-corner socialist.

"Don't be fools," he shouted. "Don't spend your lives working for the damned capitalists. Grab your chance to make a fortune. You saw that claim of mine, didn't you? Well, do you suppose it's the *only* ledge of ore in Montana? I'll say it ain't. There's copper ore under the ground all around here for miles. You can have it if you want it. All you have to do is stake out your claim, then beat it for the recording office as fast as the Lord will let you."

"Good God!" cried Paul. "Now I see his game. He wants to get the men away from us; wants to leave us flat!"

"I'm the kind of a guy that believes in helping his fellow men!" shouted Tausig, louder than ever as he sighted Paul and Ethel at the edge of his audience. "I know how to file on a mining claim and I'm willing to show each and every one of you just how it's done. Follow me and wear diamonds! To hell with the capitalists! Get out and get busy, every man jack of you, and when your stakes are driven gather around me and I'll lead you straight to the recording office. That's the kind of a guy I am! Come on now. Who's with me?"

"I am!" cried one workman.

"Good! You have first choice. Stake out a claim next to mine. No need to go grubbing around to see if there's any ore on it. There's sure to be—and even if there isn't you're only out a few dollars and a few days' time. Take a chance to make a fortune. Come on, men! Who's going to have next choice?"

"Me!" cried another man.

"Me, too!"

"Count me in on that."

One by one the workmen were falling for Tausig's glittering prospect of quick fortune easily won.

"We've got to stop it," cried Ethel. "Get me a box, Paul—quick!"

He brought it, and she stood on it.

"Men!" she cried, and immediately Tausig's audience turned around for a look at the new speaker. "That man doesn't care whether you make a fortune or not. All he wants is to get you off this job so I won't complete my contract on time. He wants revenge on me because I discharged him for robbing me. And padding the time

book wasn't all he did, either. It was father who discovered that ledge of ore. Tausig filed on it first because father was killed.

"Men! Don't you know that this whole country is an old mining district that was thoroughly prospected and worked long ago? Any ore veins that were missed then can't amount to much. You won't make your fortune like that man claims. You'll lose your recording fee and your jobs.

"Men! You have been well fed and well housed. There isn't a contractor on the line who treats his men better than I do. If you leave me my contract can't possibly be finished on time and I'll lose every penny I've got in the world. Do you want to do that?"

"If this mining business were a sure thing I wouldn't blame you for leaving me. But it isn't. It can't be! The best miners in the world—the men who made Butte the greatest copper-mining town on earth—went through this whole territory from end to end, I tell you, and anything they left isn't worth your while. Nine out of ten of you will file on ground that hasn't got a spoonful of ore, and the tenth man isn't likely to do much better. So, for the love of Heaven, keep your senses, men, and stay on your job!"

From the other side Tausig's voice came booming.

"Come on, men. Take a chance! You can't lose much and you may make a fortune. What the hell do you care whether she loses money on her contract or not?" Now that he had won their attention again Tausig made good use of it.

"Follow me," he cried. "Stake out your claims and we'll start marching to the recording office right here and now. Get your time. Go into the office and demand it. They can't keep it back from you."

"Right you are!" "We're with you, Tausig!" These and similar shouts rose from the crowd.

But there were other shouts also.

"Stay on the job, you pikers!" "You bet I'm not going to see the little girl go broke!" "All the copper you'll get you can stick in your eye!" "I wouldn't give Tausig ten dollars for his claim."

"Thank Heaven, they're not *all* going," said Ethel.

"No, but a good many are and we've got to give them their money."

Paul and Ethel went to the office, outside of which at least half the men in the camp were clamoring for their pay. Since workmen have a right to quit and demand their wages at any time there was no choice but to issue bank checks to all who demanded them. The men might have wrecked the camp otherwise; probably would have, considering the pitch of excitement to which Tausig had roused them.

With regret Paul noticed that it was the younger and more energetic men who were going, leaving the older and slower laborers on the job. He tried to dissuade them as he figured up their time, and Ethel did likewise, but his efforts were only mildly successful, and in less than an hour practically half of the camp's man power had vanished. Bankruptcy, through inability to fulfill her contract on time, stared Ethel Patterson in the face. Paul was not greatly surprised when she broke down and wept.

"Never mind," he endeavored to comfort her. "We're not licked yet. I'll hire men to take their places."

CHAPTER XII.

A TEN-DAY LIMIT.

ETHEL dried her tears at Paul's words of encouragement.

"Where can you get more men right away?" she asked. "We can't wait to have them shipped out from St. Paul."

"In the resorts at Geyser. Right to-night, too." He rose and picked up his hat.

"They won't be any good; they'll be just drunken loafers."

"I'll sober them up pretty quickly."

With the help of Nixey Reed, whom he had come to rely upon in every emergency, Paul harnessed a team of horses to a wagon and drove straight to the Honky-Tonk at Geyser.

He did not know what kind of a reception he would get from the proprietor of the place, and he did not greatly care. He worked his way through the tables and

dancing couples to the platform that answered for a stage and stood there until the music stopped. Then he stepped up on the platform and shouted for silence.

"Men," he cried, "has anybody here ever heard of Miss Patterson, who took over Camp K when her father was killed and since then has treated her men better than any other contractor on the line?"

For a moment there was silence. Paul noted that the proprietor and his employees were glowering at him for thus interfering with the patrons.

"You bet we have," sang out somebody.

"She's all to the good."

"What does she want?"

"She wants twenty hard-rock men," Paul answered. "Half her gang went crazy when they saw an outcropping of what looks like ore in the cut and rushed off to file mining claims—as if this whole country wasn't mined to a finish years ago."

"Men," he went on, speaking louder and faster as he noticed the proprietor moving toward him with evil intent in his eye, "Miss Patterson is up against it because she's got to complete her contract in two weeks or lose every cent she's got. She wants you to help her out. There's a wagon out front to haul you straight to her camp. Will you go?"

At that instant Paul felt the heavy hand of the proprietor on his shoulder. The latter was a big man with a bad reputation.

"What the hell do you mean by coming into my place and trying to get my patrons out of it?" he snarled. "Don't you see you're interferin' with business?"

"Fight!" cried some one.

"Go to it, huskies!" cried another.

A big grader leaped on top of a table.

"Men," he called out. "I move that we make a sportin' proposition to the boss of this shebang and the young feller that wants us to go to his girl's camp. Let 'em get up on the stage there and fight it out, man to man, fist an' skull. If the boss wins, we stay here. If the young feller wins, we go to the girl's camp and clean up her contract for her. What d'ye say, men?"

"We'll do it!"

"You hit the nail on the head, pard."

"Let 'em fight it out!"

"Fight! Fight!"

Eager for new excitement, the crowd commenced to chant the word "fight" to the accompaniment of foot stamping, like rooters at a college football game.

"I'm willing," Paul shouted.

"That's the talk! Fight! Fight!"

The proprietor, his face livid with rage, flung off his hat and coat and leaped upon the stage.

"Come on, damn you!" he cried.

Paul likewise peeled off his superfluous clothing and followed the other.

From opposite corners Paul and his opponent eyed each other like cats. They put up their hands and circled around each other like professional pugilists, searching for an opening. The saloon man was heavier and more powerfully built than Paul, but the latter now had the advantage of many days spent at wholesome exercise in the open air.

The big man led. Paul stepped inside the clumsy swing and beat his antagonist to the punch with a clean jolt to the jaw that rocked the boss and caused the audience to almost lift the roof with its cheers.

"Hurrah for Camp K!"

"We're with you, kid!"

"Knockout! Knockout!"

The saloon man led again, and this time tried to clutch Paul and drag him to the floor for a rough-and-tumble fight in which he figured he would have the advantage.

But since his fight with Tausig, Paul was wary of such methods. He danced out of range and peppered the other with rights and lefts that staggered him and caused him to leave his chin unguarded. Paul stepped in then and swung a right to the jaw with all the power of his body behind it. The saloon man dropped like a log.

"One—two—" The audience chanted the numbers up to ten, then, since the boss had not regained his feet, they cheered again and started for the door.

"All aboard for Camp K!"

There were more than twenty who wished to go. Paul took three extra men and got the whole twenty-three into the wagon box, then told his few remaining

well-wishers that he was sorry he could not use them. With songs and wild cheering the wagon proceeded to camp, where Ethel came to the office door and was lustily cheered by her new gang. Paul took them to the bunk-house and made them comfortable for the night, then went to the office, where Ethel awaited him.

"How in the world did you manage to get them?" she asked.

"By telling them that the finest little girl on the grade wanted them," said Paul—and then he blushed and felt as awkward as a schoolboy as he realized that his speech had been more personal than he had intended.

Ethel looked at him curiously as she told him how much she appreciated his efforts. Next day Paul set his new men at work, and, to his joyous surprise, found that they were almost as well acquainted with hard-rock work as the quitters had been. Their enthusiasm and willingness to do their best was unbounded. They admired fighters like Ethel Patterson and Paul Monroe, and were not at all backward about showing their approval of the two, either by word or deed.

Paul feared at first that the new men might get stricken with the mining fever, but they did not. The arguments of the original workers who had stuck influenced them; also the fact that, even if there were some good claims, the men who had deserted the camp were already in possession of them.

Two days after the new gang arrived the superintendent of construction paid the camp a visit, and he and Ethel went out and joined Paul. Mr. O'Brien pointed to a point down the line where a column of smoke was rising.

"That's the track-laying gang," he said. "They're coming fast. You've got to be through here in ten days or you're going to hold up the whole railroad from one end to the other. Needless to say, under such circumstances the road wouldn't think of releasing you from the forfeit that you agreed to pay in case you can't let them through."

"We'll get finished all right," Paul promised.

"I'm sure we will," said Ethel.

"All right—but, from the looks of things, you won't have more than a few hours to spare."

When the superintendent left Ethel looked anxiously at her foreman.

"Do you really think we can get through in time?" she inquired. "I can't afford to pay the forfeit for even one day, you know."

"We'll get through or I'll die trying," said Paul.

But unfortunately he had not reckoned upon the reappearance of Tausig. After supper that evening the ex-foreman appeared and with him most of the workers whose desertion had necessitated the hiring of new men. They were not shouting and cheering as they had been when they left.

"Hello, Tausig," said Paul. "What's the matter with you fellows? You don't seem very cheerful."

"Naw. Most of the bums were afraid to put up their money when it came to a showdown, and the ones that did have been grouchin' about it all the way back. Say, what's the chance for us to get some supper at your cook-shack?"

"Not a chance in the world," Paul replied. "Your gang left me in the lurch, and I'm through with them."

"Can't they have their jobs back?"

"I should say not. I've replaced them."

Tausig walked back to where his sullen-faced followers awaited him. Growls and curses were heard, and presently the whole gang advanced upon Paul.

"Why can't we have our jobs back?" they demanded.

"Because I wouldn't think of firing my new men to make way for a bunch of quitters like you. If I had enough equipment I might take you on and keep the others, too, but I haven't."

"Can't you even give us a handout?"

"No. Even if I wanted to, which I don't, I can't, because the cook went down to Geyser."

The quitters conferred among themselves again, and it was plain that Tausig was liberal with his advice. Then their leader came forward.

"Monroe," he said, "if these men don't get their jobs back, and some supper to boot, they're going to wreck your camp."

CHAPTER XIII.

BATTLE.

EVEN as Tausig spoke his gang started a movement toward the cook-shack.

"Wait a minute!" cried Paul.

"Feed us first, and then we'll talk to you," shouted some one in the front rank.

The mob continued to advance, and Paul saw that further argument was useless. He ran to the bunk-house, and there found his men lounging around, blissfully unconscious of the disturbance outside.

"Men," he addressed them, "I explained to you down in the Honky-Tonk why it was that I wanted you. A bunch of my workers quit me cold when I was struggling to finish the contract on time and ran off to file on mining claims. Now that same bunch is back again. They demand their old jobs. I told them they couldn't have them; that in order to hire them I would have to fire you; and, since you had stuck to me when they deserted, I wouldn't think of doing that. Did I do the right thing?"

The men were upon their feet instantly.

"You bet you did!"

"Hurrah for Monroe!"

These and similar cries rang through the bunk-house.

"Men," Paul continued, "you've got to do one thing or another—give up your jobs to these quitters or throw them out of the camp. I'd rather see you fight, but remember I'm not asking you to. Make up your minds quick, though, because they're probably starting in to wreck the camp already."

By way of answer, the men rushed to the door, shouting as they did so, "Lead us to them!" "We'll show them whether they can run us off or not!" and similar cries.

"Grab some clubs," Paul advised.

The men picked up whatever came to their hands, and in a moment they were all outside, Paul at their head.

"There they are!" he shouted, and pointed toward the cook shack, where the quitters were pounding on the door and threatening to break it down.

"Don't start anything till I tell you to," he commanded his men; then he ran forward to Tausig's mob.

"Look here, you fellows!" he cried. "You've got to get out of this camp. I'd rather you'd go peaceably, but if you won't I've got a gang behind me that will throw you out. Now, what do you want to do?"

The mob ceased hammering on the cook-shack, and for a moment it seemed that they might comply with Paul's request. Then the comparative silence was broken by Tausig's booming voice.

"Don't let him bluff you!" he cried. "Stand up for your rights. You never quit your jobs here; you only took a few days off. His men won't fight. They're nothing but bums he picked up in the saloons."

"If you don't get out peaceably, you're going to get smashed heads," Paul warned.

"Stand your ground, men!" cried Tausig.

The quitters all began shouting then.

"Bring on your bums!" they yelled. "Throw us out if you can!"

Paul turned to his followers.

"They're asking for fight, men," he shouted. "Let's give it to them. Come on!"

The two parties clashed; fists flew, and sticks and stones—anything and everything that could be swung or thrown. Cries of rage and pain rent the air; curses sounded and shrieks and moans.

For a moment both sides held their ground.

"Keep it up, men!" cried Paul Monroe. "You've got 'em going."

But the wish was father to the thought. Tausig's gang was not going as yet. Penniless and hungry, they were in a desperate mood. Inspired by the ex-foreman's booming voice, they rallied from the first shock which caused them to give a little, then slowly, inch by inch, they forced Paul's men backward.

But Paul possessed resources that the other side did not have—men in reserve. It

was only his new gang that fought at first. But as the battle grew more intense and the cries and curses grew louder, his old gang came tumbling from another bunk-house and joined in the fray.

Now it was the deserters who gave ground. Slowly and sullenly they retreated before the renewed onslaught of clubs and fists.

Paul was in the thick of the fight. Once he felt a sharp rap on his head that dizzied him, but he recovered in a moment and continued to use both his fists and his voice. He had expected to encounter Tausig. He did not do so, but at first he attached no importance to that.

Backward, ever backward, the deserters were crowded—faster and faster, until at last they broke and ran. Paul's men followed after them. He tried to halt them, to let well enough alone, but his battle-crazed fellows were out of hand now and he could only stand and watch them chase the remnants of the rebel force clear out of the camp and down the road toward Geyser.

Suddenly he gasped as a terrible thought came to him. Ethel! Was she safe? He had forgotten her. He ran to the office. She was not there. He ran to her cabin and hammered on the door. No answer. He turned the knob; the door opened, and he plunged inside. The place was empty. Further, it was in disorder.

With his heart beating more wildly even than in the thick of battle, Paul raced to Tausig's shack. He remembered now that the ex-foreman had mysteriously dropped out of the hand-to-hand fighting some time previously. The shack was dark. He pounded on the door, then tried the knob. The door was locked. He put his shoulder against it and burst in. He lighted a match, and in its ruddy glow saw what he had dreaded.

Ethel was lying, bound hand and foot, across the bunk, where Tausig had flung her that very moment.

Paul threw his match away and dove straight at the point where Tausig had been. The two men clutched each other, and in a second they were rolling over and over on the floor in the darkness. Paul

let go his first hold and strove for a better one—for a grasp on the big brute's throat that would choke him into insensibility.

Suddenly Paul's hand encountered something that startled and repelled him as the touch of a snake might have—the cold, hard surface of a revolver in Tausig's right hand. He grasped it, and the two men fought for possession. They struggled more desperately than before.

They rolled and kicked, each straining to obtain control of the weapon. Suddenly a terrible roar crashed on Paul's ears and a blinding sheet of flame revealed the scene in a terrible flashlight. At the same instant Paul felt his antagonist limp and lifeless. He sprang up, fumbled for another match, and lighted Tausig's lamp.

His first action was to free Ethel.

"Did he hurt you?" he demanded.

"No, no! Just my hands, where the rope cut."

They both knelt beside the wounded man. "He's almost gone," said Paul.

He knelt closer, and, as Tausig's eyes opened, he shouted in his ear.

"You're almost gone. You'd better confess. Didn't you fix that hole so it would blow up Mr. Patterson?"

Paul could hear the gasping intake of Ethel's breath.

Tausig's lips moved, and Paul put his ear to them.

"Yes—sorry," whispered Tausig; and they were the last words that he ever uttered.

Ethel rose slowly to her feet.

"Is he—"

"Yes," said Paul as he, too, rose slowly. "He's gone. Poor devil! He said he was sorry."

Ethel began to weep then, so violently that Paul had to pick her up and carry her to her own shack. She recovered quickly, however.

"All right now," she said. "The shock of learning that father had been murdered was a bit too much. See you in the morning, Paul. I guess there won't be any more trouble to-night."

"Good night," he said, and started toward his own quarters.

Suddenly he stopped. "By Jove!" he

said. "The mine! It's hers now if I can get there first." He dashed toward the stable, and on the way spied Nixey Reed. "Nixey," he cried, "come here, quick. Help me saddle up. I'm going to start for Great Falls right away so I can file on Tausig's mine for Ethel. And I want you to act as a special guard for her while I'm away."

"Sure, I will," said Nixey. "But you can't go anywhere on the saddlehorse."

"Why not?"

"Because somebody went dashing out of the camp on it only two minutes ago."

"Curse the luck!" cried Paul. "Some one got wise to the fact that Tausig is dead and his mining claim will revert to the government. I've got to beat him to Great Falls—but how?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHASE.

"THERE'S another horse in the stable," suggested Nixey. "He is not a regular saddlehorse, but he might do."

"He could never cover the forty miles between here and Great Falls."

"I don't know about that. He ain't much to look at, but lots of ugly plugs can travel better than your nifty-looking saddle ponies."

"All right," said Paul. "Saddle him. I'll take a chance. Can't get there any other way, that's sure."

If Nixey only possessed a little more education or knowledge of mining claims Paul would have sent him to the recorder's office. The fellow was lighter in weight, and therefore likely to travel faster, but Paul feared to trust him. There was too much chance that Nixey would be outwitted, even though he did succeed in winning the race to Great Falls.

"Tell the straw boss to get the men on the job," he instructed Nixey as he prepared for his desperate ride. "Remind Miss Patterson that she's got to phone the county coroner about Tausig. And don't forget to guard her. Stick around her cabin all night."

"I will."

"All right then. Here goes." Paul flung himself into the saddle and set off down the road at a gallop.

Paul was a novice in the art of horseback riding, but he paid no attention to that. At first he was jolted uncomfortably, but after a while he settled naturally into an easier position.

His mount, for all its plow-horse appearance, possessed plenty of pep, and he rejoiced that the animal seemed more than willing to do its share. He remembered hearing some one remark that a gentle lope, interspersed with plenty of walking spells, was the easiest way to cover a long distance.

After steadily plugging for ten miles or more Paul rejoiced to hear the sound of hoof beats in front of him. He was gaining!

But the other rider seemed to be warned by the hoof beats behind him, because, as mile after mile was covered, Paul made no further gain.

The night was inky-black, therefore Paul did not attempt to guide his horse, but let him chose his own way. After a while he also let the animal choose its own gait. He was satisfied, for the time being, to remain within earshot of the rider in front. The real race would come during the last five miles.

Paul was not very familiar with the country, but as the first gray signs of the approaching day showed in the east he realized that the city could not be many miles away, and he urged his steed to greater effort.

Gradually he crept up until finally, as the chimneys of the city showed plainly in the distance, he drew level with his competitor. He recognized the man now—one of the deserters who had seemed to be particularly friendly with Tausig.

"Going somewhere?" Paul queried genially.

The man scowled at him. "Yes," he snapped.

"Think you can beat me there?"

The man replied by spurring his horse to renewed effort. Paul did likewise, and to his gratification soon had gained a comfortable lead.

He still retained this lead when he reached the outskirts of the city. He had

only a vague idea as to where the land office was situated. He decided to gain a still greater lead, so that he could take his time to stop and inquire. He spurred his horse forward again—then suddenly pitched clear out of the saddle as his faithful steed stumbled and fell and did not arise.

Paul jumped up. The other rider was approaching with a grin on his face. Paul stood in the roadway and waited for him.

But the man divined Paul's intention to stop him and put spurs to his horse. Paul leaped at the bridle as the man galloped by, but he was not an expert horseman and he failed. He was flung into the roadway again, and as he scrambled to his feet the laughter of his triumphant rival came floating back to him.

Paul's horse still remained on the ground and it needed no expert eye to see that it could not carry him the remaining distance to the recorder's office. Desperately he racked his brains for a plan to win. He dashed into a suburban grocery store that was just opening up, and without asking permission, grabbed the telephone receiver.

"Police!" he cried, and in a moment was connected with the central station.

"There's a man on a stolen horse approaching the mining office," he told the official at the other end. "I want him arrested before he gets there. Can you do that?" He gave his name and address, and having secured a promise that the horse thief would be arrested as soon as possible, he proceeded toward the center of the city.

From a casual pedestrian he received instructions as to the location of the mining office. He hurried there and was gratified to see that no one was ahead of him. The place was due to open in an hour.

He wondered, as he sank down on the stone steps for a much needed rest, what had become of his rival. He was soon to find out. The man approached in the company of a police officer.

"There he is!" the fellow cried. "There's the dirty dog that beat me to the office by telephoning you to arrest me. A hell of a fine bunch of cops you are, to let a guy pull a game like that on you. Can't you see he's got nothing on me? That was only a game to get here ahead of me."

Paul jumped to his feet. "I have got something on him," he said to the policeman. "The horse he rode here was stolen from Camp K on the B. and N., where I am foreman, and I can prove it."

"You want to enter a charge against him, then?" asked the officer.

"I certainly do."

"Then both of you will have to come along with me to the police station."

Paul wondered if he had done the wise thing. He would have to leave the land office. He might get back to it in time and he might not. He went to the police station and entered a formal complaint against the Tausig man, and the latter, despite his protests, was held in a cell pending his trial. Paul then returned to the recorder's office to find that he was still the first man to arrive.

He inquired what steps were necessary to secure Tausig's claim for Ethel Patterson until such time as Tausig's estate would relinquish all claim to it. He found that it could be held for her and he took the necessary steps. He concluded the task with a feeling of relief—and turned to find himself looking at a man who wore the star of a deputy sheriff.

"Sorry to trouble you, Mr. Monroe," this person said, "but the sheriff wants you in connection with the killing of a man out at Camp K, and I've got my orders to take you there for the coroner's inquest."

"Good enough," said Paul. "That means free transportation and good company."

But as he proceeded homeward under arrest, he was not quite so sanguine as he appeared to be. The word "killing" which the deputy sheriff had used had an ugly sound.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONDITIONAL PARTNERSHIP.

PAUL was gratified to note as he approached the cut at Camp K that the work was proceeding full blast. But in the camp itself the sight that met his eyes was not so cheerful. A coroner's jury

had taken possession of the premises and was awaiting his arrival. Ethel looked as though she had passed a sleepless night.

The proceedings was called to order.

"Now, Mr. Monroe," said the foreman of the jury, "we would like to know just how the trouble started and how this man Tausig met his death."

Paul told his story in a straightforward manner that seemed to impress the jury. Other witnesses, including Ethel, corroborated him, and after hearing all the testimony, the jury went into secret session. Presently they returned.

"We have decided," the foreman said, "that, inasmuch as the dead man met his end while he was engaged in committing a crime, there is no need to hold Mr. Monroe."

The sheriff congratulated Paul as he set him free.

"That's Montana justice for you," he said. "No monkey-doodle business about a trial that would waste time and use up the county's money and get nowhere in the end, since any fool can see that you killed Tausig in self-defense."

An hour later the only reminder of the recent trouble in Camp K was the shack that the dead man had erected.

Paul informed Ethel that he had secured the mine for her.

"Fine!" she said. "Since it will be located right on the railroad line, the ore will at least be easy to ship to a smelter. We'll investigate that after the contract is finished, and if it's worth anything you are going to have a share in it."

"I'll accept a share on one condition only," said Paul. He looked at her significantly and she immediately changed the subject.

"But we've got no time to bother about mining now," Ethel continued. "The contract isn't finished yet and the track-laying gang is only a few miles away."

"Come on out to the cut with me and explain things to the men," suggested Paul. "They'll get it done for you or die trying, I'll bet."

So the two of them went up and down the cut, directing the work and encouraging the men.

The latter responded nobly. Some night work was necessary, but when the track-layers arrived the way was clear for them. The contract was completed on time. The men were paid off, with a small bonus for their good work, and presently Paul and Ethel were left alone in the camp with only a few workers, Nixey Reed among them, to assist in moving the outfit.

"Now we can investigate the mine," said Ethel. "What shall we do? Send for an expert?"

"I've already done that," said Paul. "A man from the smelter at Great Falls should arrive this very day."

When the expert came he spent an hour or two looking over the ground, then made a verbal report.

"I doubt if you'll make a fortune out of that seam," he said. "It is thin and the ore doesn't grade very high, and I'm practically certain that it will peter out in a few months. But since it's right on the railroad, it's worth working. It ought to be good for ten thousand dollars."

"That's more than I expected," said Paul.

"Of course we'll go ahead and work it," said Ethel after the expert had left.

"We?" said Paul.

Ethel blushed. "I promised you a share in it, you know."

"And I said I would accept it on one condition only."

There was an awkward silence, which Ethel broke presently.

"What is your condition?"

"You!" said Paul. "I'll accept a share only on condition that you marry me."

"Marry you?" exclaimed Ethel. "Why, you never even said that you liked me, much less—anything else."

"I guess that's right," Paul admitted. "I wanted to often enough, but I didn't have the courage. And you didn't make it easy. I never saw such a businesslike girl."

Ethel smiled.

"Well, I haven't any business on my hands now, have I? And won't have until we get our mine in operation."

Paul took hold of both her hands.

"We?" he repeated. "Did I hear you use the word 'we' after I told you what my partnership condition was?"

Ethel just looked at him and smiled.

And Paul knew then that, along with a success in his new job, he had won something vastly more precious—the love of the girl he had adored from the moment he first set eyes on her.

(The end.)

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APRIL CAME

APRIL came to me
With eyes that were wet,
A dream and a vision
I could not forget.

April came to me,
And, oh, she was fair
With the mists of the mountains
Like pearls in her hair.

April came to me
One rainy day;
Long, long I held her,
And, lo, she was May.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

The Garden of Eden

Part II
by Max Brand



Author of "The Untamed," "Trailin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

BEN CONNOR, race track gambler, comes to Lukin to forget his fast life and relax from his feverish activities, but no sooner does he put up at the local hotel when he learns of a deaf-mute negro who raises the finest horses possible. Ruth Manning, telegraph operator, gives him the details. The eccentric negro lives in a valley, and no white man has ever visited the place. Impulsively, Connor starts out on the journey. On the outskirts of the valley Connor makes the acquaintance of two uncanny negroes whose religion is horse raising.

CHAPTER IX.

THE APE'S HEAD.

THAT faint and rhythmic chiming which Connor had heard from the mountain when he first saw the valley now came again through the gate, more clearly. There was something familiar about the sound—yet Connor could not place it.

"Did you mark?" said Ephraim, shaking his head. "Did you see the colt shy at the white rock as he ran? In my household that could never happen; and yet Jacob does well enough, for the blood of Harith is as stubborn as old oak and wild as a wolf. But your gift, sir"—and here he turned with much respect toward Connor—"is a great one. I have never seen Harith's sons come to a man as Abra came to you."

He was surprised to see the stranger staring toward the gate as if he watched a ghost.

"He did not gallop," said Connor pres-

ently, and his voice faltered. "He flowed. He poured himself through the air."

He swept a hand across his forehead and with great effort calmed the muscles of his face.

"Are there more horses like that in the valley?"

The old negro hesitated, for there was such a glittering hunger in the eyes of this white man that it abashed him. Vanity, however, brushed scruple away.

"More like Abra in the valley? So!"

He seemed to hunt for superlatives with which to overwhelm his questioner.

"The worst in my household is Tabari, the daughter of Numan, and she was foaled lame in the left foreleg. But if ten like Abra were placed in one corral and Tabari in the other, a wise man would give the ten and take the one and render thanks that such good fortune had come his way."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Connor in that same, small, choked voice.

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"I speak calmly," said the grave negro. He added with some hesitation: "But if I must tell the whole truth, I shall admit that my household is not like the household of the blood of Rustir. Just as she was the queen of horses, so those of her blood are above other horses as the master is above me. Yet, if ten like Tabari were placed in one corral and the stallion Glani were placed in another, I suppose that a wise man would give the ten for the one."

He added with a sigh: "But I should not have such wisdom."

Connor smiled.

"And at that rate it would require a hundred like Abra to buy Glani?" he asked.

"A thousand," said the old man instantly, "and then the full price would not be paid. I have already asked the master to cross him with Hira. He will answer me soon; one touch of Glani's blood will lift the strain in my household. My colts are good mettle—but the fire, the soul of Glani!"

He bowed his head.

"Ah, they are coming, Jacob and Joseph."

His keen ear heard a sound which was not audible to Connor for several moments; then two gray horses swept into the circle of the firelight, and from the mare which led Abra by several yards, a stalwart negro dismounted.

An intermixture of white blood must have been the refining influence in Jacob and Ephraim, for only their color told their race; but Joseph was the true Ethiopian with narrow forehead, bulging over the eyes, a flattened nose, and great, shapeless mouth. Only physically he seemed formidable, his shoulders ponderous and his hands hanging far down his thigh. The gambler beheld him with greater confidence.

"If you are Joseph," he said, "I suppose Jacob had already told you about me. My name is Connor. I've been hunting up the Girard River, struck across the mountains yonder, and here I've brought up with a lame mule and a lamer horse. The point is that I want to rest up in your valley until my animals can go on. Is it possible?"

While he spoke the negro watched him with eyes which squinted in their intensity,

but when he ended Joseph answered not a word. Connor remembered now what he had heard of the deaf mute who alone went back and forth from the Garden of Eden, and his heart fell. It was talking to a face of stone.

In the meantime Joseph continued to examine the stranger. From head to foot the little, bright eyes moved, leisurely, and Connor grew hot as he endured it. When the survey was completed to his own satisfaction, Joseph went first to the mule and next to the horse, lifting their feet one by one, then running his hands over their legs. After this he turned to Jacob and his great black fingers glided through the characters of the language of the mute, bunching, knotting, darting out in a fluid swiftness.

"Joseph says," translated Ephraim, "that your horse is lame, but that he can climb the hills if you go on foot; the mule is not lame at all, but is pretending, because he is tired."

An oath rose up in the throat of Connor, but he checked it against his teeth and smiled at Joseph. The big negro hissed through his teeth and his mare sprang to his side. She was not more than fourteen two, and slenderly made compared with Abra, yet she had borne the great bulk of Joseph with ease before, and now she was apparently ready to carry him again. He dropped his hand upon her withers, and facing Connor, swept his arm out in a broad gesture of dismissal. Vaguely the white man noticed this, but his real interest centered on the form of the mare. He was seeing her not with that unwieldy bulk crushing her back, but with a flyweight jockey mounted on a racing pad riding her past the grand stand. He was hearing the odds which the bookies offered; he was watching those odds drop by leaps and bounds as he hammered away at them, betting in lumps of hundreds and five hundreds, staking his fortune on his first "sure thing." Even as she stood passive, tossing her nose, he knew her speed, and it took his breath. Abra himself would walk away from ordinary company, but this gray mare—slowly Connor looked back to the face of Joseph and saw that the negro was waiting to see his command obeyed. For the first time he noted the cartridge

belt strung across the fellow's gaunt middle—lean as the loins of an ape and the holster in which pulled the weight of a forty-five. In case of doubt, here was a cogent reason to hurry a loiterer. To persuade that ugly face of ebony would never have been easy, but to persuade him through an interpreter made the affair impossible. Struggling for a loophole of escape, he absentmindedly un-snapped from his watch chain the little ivory talisman, the ape head, and commenced to finger it. It had been his constant companion for years and in a measure he connected his luck with it.

"My friend," said Connor to Ephraim, "you see my position? But if I can't do better is there any objection to my using this fire of yours for cooking? The fire, at least, is outside the valley."

Even this question Ephraim apparently did not feel qualified to answer. He turned first to the gigantic negro and conversed with him at some length; his own fluent signals were answered by single movements on the part of Joseph, and Connor recognized the signs of dissent.

"I have told him everything," said the ancient negro, turning again to Connor and shaking his head in sympathy. "And how Abra came to you, but though the horse trusted you, Joseph does not wish you to stay. I am sorry."

Connor looked through the gate into the darkness of the Garden of Eden; at the entrance to his promised land he was to be turned back. In his despair he opened his palm and looked down absently at the little grinning ape head of ivory. Even while he was deep in thought he felt the silence which settled over the three negroes, and when he looked up he saw the glittering eyes of Joseph fixed upon the trinket. That instant new hope came to Connor; he closed his hand over the ape head, and turning to Ephraim he said:

"Very well. If there's nothing else for me to do, I'll take the chance of getting through the mountains with my lame nags."

As he spoke he threw the reins over the neck of the chestnut; but before he could put his foot in the stirrup the big negro was beside him and touched his shoulder.

"Wait!" said Joseph, and the gambler

paused with astonishment. The mask of the mute which he had hitherto kept on his face now fell from it.

"Let me see," the black giant was saying, and held out his hand for the ivory image.

The pulse of Connor doubled its beat—but with his fingers still closed he said:

"The ivory head is an old companion of mine and had brought me a great deal of luck."

The torchlight changed in the eyes of Joseph as the sun glints and glimmers on watered silk.

"I would not hurt it," he said, and made a gingerly motion to show how light and deft his fingers could be.

"Very well," said Connor, "but I rarely let it out of my hand."

He stepped closer to the firelight and exposed the little carving again. It was a curious bit of work, with every detail nicely executed; pin point emeralds were inset for eyes, the lips grinned back from tiny fangs of gold, and the swelling neck suggested the powerful ape body of the model. In the firelight the teeth and eyes flashed.

The ugly face of Joseph grinned in sympathy; with his yellow teeth and his shifting eyes he might have served as a model for the little carving. Ephraim and Jacob also had drawn close, and the white man saw in the three black faces one expression: they had become children before a master, and when Connor placed the trinket in the great paw of Joseph the other two flashed at him glances of envy. As for the big negro, he was transformed; he had been swept a thousand generations back toward an animal prototype.

"Speak truth," he said suddenly. "Why do you wish to enter the Garden?"

"I've already told you, I think," said Connor. "It's to rest up until the horse and mule are well again."

The glance of the huge negro, which had hitherto wandered from the trinket to the face of the white man, now steadied brightly upon the latter.

"There must be another reason."

Connor felt himself pressed to the wall.

"Look at the thing you have in your hand, Joseph. You are asking yourself: 'What is it? Who made it?' See how the

firelight glitters on it—perhaps there is life in it!”

“Ah!” sighed the three in one breath.

“Perhaps there is power in it. I have used it well and it has brought me a great deal of good luck. But you would like to know all those things, Joseph. Now look at the gate to the Garden!”

He waved to the lofty and dark cleft before them.

“It is like a face to me. People live behind it. Who are they? Who is the master? What does he do? What is his power? That is another reason why I wish to go in; and why should you fear me? I am alone; I am unarmed.”

It seemed that Joseph learned more from Connor’s expression than from his words.

“The law is the will of David.”

The Garden became to Connor as the forbidden room to Bluebeard’s wife; it tempted him as a high cliff tempts the climber toward a fall. He mustered a calm air and voice.

“That is a matter I can arrange with your master. He may have laws to keep out thieves, but certainly he has nothing against honest men.”

Joseph shrugged his big shoulders, but Ephraim answered: “The will of David never changes. I am no longer young, but since I have been old enough to remember, I have never seen a man either come into the valley or leave it except Joseph.”

The solemnity of the old negro staggered Connor. He felt his resolution to enter at any cost waver, and then Abra, the young stallion, came to his side and looked in his face.

It was the decisive touch. The life which the devotee would risk for his God, or the patriot for his country, the gambler was willing to venture for the sake of a “sure thing.”

“Let us exchange gifts,” said Connor; “I give you the ivory head. It may bring you good luck. You give me the right to enter the valley and I accept any good or evil that comes to me.”

The huge fingers of Joseph curled softly over the image.

“Beware of the law!” cried Ephraim. “And the hand of the master!”

The giant shrank, but he looked at Ephraim with sullen defiance.

“Come,” he said to Connor. “This is on your own head.”

CHAPTER X.

THE ENTRANCE TO EDEN.

“IT is a long ride to the house of David,” said Jacob. “Your horse is footsore; take Abra.”

But Ephraim broke in: “If you care for speed and wise feet beneath you, Tabari herself is there.”

He whistled as Jacob had done before, but with another grace-note at the end.

“Those of my household answer when they are called,” continued the old man proudly. “Listen!”

A soft whinny out of the darkness, and Tabari galloped into the firelight, and stopped at the side of her master motionless.

“Choose,” said Ephraim.

He smiled at Jacob, who in return was darkly silent.

The mare tugged at the heartstrings of Connor, but he answered, slipping carefully into the formal language which apparently was approved most in the valley.

“She is worthy of a king, but Abra was offered to me first. But will he carry a saddle?”

“He will carry anything but a whip,” said Jacob, casting a glance of triumph at Ephraim. “You will see!” He was already busy at the knot under the flap of Connor’s saddle, and presently he slipped the saddle from the back of the chestnut. “Come!” he called.

Abra came, but he came like a fighter into the ring, dancing, ready for trouble.

“Fool!” shouted Jacob, stamping. “Fool, and grandson of a fool, stand!”

The ears of Abra flicked back along his neck and he trembled as the saddle was swung over him. Under its impact he crouched and shuddered, but the outbreak of bucking for which Connor waited did not come. The jerk on the cinch brought a snort from him, but that was all.

“We may not put iron in his mouth,”

said Jacob, as Connor came up with the bridle, "but a touch on this will turn him or stop him, as you wish."

As he spoke he picked up a small rope, which he knotted around the neck of Abra close to the ears, and handed the end to Connor.

"Look!" he said to the horse, pointing to Connor. "This is your master to-night. Bear him as you would bear me, Abra, without leaping or stumbling, smoothly, as son of Khalissa should do. And hark," he added in the ear of the young stallion; "if the mare of Joseph outruns you, you are no horse of my household, but a mongrel, a bloodless knave."

Joseph was already trotting through the gate and growing dim beyond, so Connor put his foot in the stirrup and swung into the saddle. He landed as upon springs, all the lithe body of the stallion giving under the shock; and Connor felt a quivering power beneath him like the vibration of a racing motor. Abra's eyes glinted as he threw his head high to take stock of the new master.

"Go," commanded Jacob; "and remember your speed, for the honor of him who trained you!"

The last words were whipped away from the ear of Connor and trailed into a murmur behind him, for without a preliminary step Abra sprang from a stand into a full gallop. That forward lurch swayed Connor far back; he lost touch with his stirrups, but, clinging desperately with his knees, he was presently able to right himself. There was hard gravel beneath them, but the gait was as soft as if Abra ran in deep sand without labor; there was no more wrench and shock than the ghost of a man riding a ghost of a horse.

A column of black shot by on either hand; Connor was through the gate to the Garden of Eden and rushing down the slope beyond. He knew this dimly, but chiefly he was aware only of the whipping of the wind. Something Ephraim had said came into his memory: "If there were ten like Abra in one corral, and one like Tabari in another, as wise man—" But, no doubt, Ephraim had jested.

For, glancing up, he saw the tops of tall

trees rushing past him against the sky, and for the first time he knew the speed of that gallop. In his exultation he threw up his hand, and his shout rang before him and behind. That taught him a lesson he would never forget when he sat the saddle on an Eden Gray; for Abra lurched into a run with a suddenness that swayed Connor against the cantle again.

He steadied himself quickly and called to Abra; the first word cut down that racing gait to the long, free stride, but the brief rush had taken the breath of the rider, and now he looked about him.

He had been in California years before, and now he recognized the peculiar, clean perfume of the trees which line the road; they were the eucalyptus, and they fenced the way with a gigantic hedge several rows deep. It was a winding road that they followed, dipping over a rolling ground and swinging leisurely from side to side to avoid high places, so that the vista of the trees was continually in motion, twisting back and forth; or when he looked straight up he saw the slender tree-points brushing past the stars. So he galloped into a long, straight stretch with a pale gleam of water beyond it; and between he saw Joseph.

It was strange that in spite of the speed of Abra Joseph's mare had not been overtaken; for no matter what quality the mare might have, she carried in the gigantic negro an impost of some two hundred and fifty pounds. A suspicion of discourtesy on his part must have come to Joseph, for now he brought his horse back to a canter that allowed Connor to come close, so close indeed that he saw Joseph laughing in a horrible soundless way and beckoning him on, very much as though he challenged Abra. Surely the fellow must know that no horse could concede such weight to Abra, but Connor waved his arm to signify that he accepted the challenge, and called on Abra.

There followed the breathless lunge forward, the sinking of the body as the stride lengthened, the whirl of wind against his face; Connor sat the saddle erect, smiling, and waited for Joseph to come back to him.

But Joseph did not come, and as the

mare reached the river and her hoofs rang on the bridge Connor saw with unspeakable wonder that he had actually lost ground. Once more he called on Abra, and as they struck the bridge in turn the young stallion was fully extended, while Connor swung forward in the saddle to throw more weight on the withers and take the strain from the long black muscles. Leaning close to the neck of Abra, with the mane whipping his face, he squinted down the road at Joseph, and growled with savage satisfaction as he saw the mare drift back to him. If he could reach her with a sprint she was beaten, for she bore the extra burden. Once more he called on Abra, and heard a slight grunt as the stallion gave the last burst of his strength; the hoofs of the two roared on the hard road, and Joseph came back hand over hand. Connor, laughing exultantly, squinted into the wind.

"Good boy!" he muttered. "Good old Abra! If he had Salvator under him we'd get him at this rate. We're on his hip—Now!"

He was indeed in touch with the flying mare, and, looking through the dimness, he marveled at her long, free swing, the level drive of the croup, and—he saw with astonishment—her pricking ears! Not as if she were racing, but merely galloping. He flattened himself along the neck of Abra and called on him again, slapped his shoulder with the flat of his hand, flicked him along the flank with the butt of the rope; but the mare held him invincibly; he could not gain the breadth of a hair, and by the pounding of Abra's forefeet he knew that the stallion was running himself out. At that moment, to crown his bewilderment, Joseph turned, and saw that the negro was laughing again in that soundless way. Only for a moment; then he turned, and, leaning over the withers of his mount, the mare lengthened, it seemed to Connor, and moved away.

Her hips went past him, then her tail, flying out straight behind, a streak of silver; and last of all, there was the hiss of derision from Joseph whistling back to him.

Connor threw himself back into the saddle and brought the stallion down to a mod-

erate pace. One hand was clutched at his throat, for it seemed to him that his heart was beating there. Before him raced a vision of Ben Connor, king of the race-tracks of the world, with horses no handicapper could measure.

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID.

A SECOND thought made him lean a little, listening closely, and then he discovered that after this terrific trial Abra was breathing deep and free. Connor sat straight again and smiled. They must be close to the lake he had seen from the mountain, for among the trees to his left was a faint gleam of water. A moment later this glimmer went out, and the hoofbeats of Abra were muffled on turf. They had left the road and headed for a scattering of lights. Joseph had drawn the mare back to a hand-gallop, and Abra followed the example; at this rocking gait they swept through the grove between two long, low buildings, always climbing, and came suddenly upon a larger house. On three sides Connor looked down upon water; the building was behind him. Not a light showed in it, but he made out the low, single story, the sense of weight, and crude arches of the Mission style. Through an opening in the center of the façade he looked into darkness which he knew must be the *patio*.

Following the example of Joseph, he dismounted, and while the big negro, with his waddling, difficult walk, disappeared into the court, Connor stepped back and looked over Abra. Starlight was enough to see him by, for he glimmered with running sweat even in the semidarkness, but it was plain from his high head and inquisitive muzzle that he was neither winded nor down-hearted. He followed Connor like a dog when the gambler went in turn to the mare. She turned about nervously to watch the newcomer. Not until Abra had touched noses with her and perhaps spoken to her the dumb horse-talk would she allow Connor to come close, and even then he could not see her as clearly as the stallion. By

running his fingertips over her he discovered the reason—only on the flanks and across the breast was she wet with perspiration, and barely moist on the thighs and belly. The race had winded her no more than a six-furlong canter.

He was still marveling at this discovery when Joseph appeared under the arch carrying a lantern and beckoned him in, leading the way to a large *patio*, surrounded by a continuous arcade. In the center a fountain was alternately silver and shadow in the swinging lantern light. The floor of the *patio* was close-shaven turf.

Joseph hung the lantern on the inside of one of the arches and turned to Connor, apparently to invite him to take one of the chairs under the arcade. Instead, he raised his hand to impose silence. Connor heard, from some distance, a harsh sound of breathing of inconceivable strength. For though it was plainly not close to them, he could mark each intake and expulsion of breath. And the noise created for him the picture of a monster.

"Let us go to the master," said Joseph, and turned straight across the *patio* in the direction of that sonorous breathing.

Connor followed, by no means at ease. From the withered negroes to huge Joseph had been a long step. How far would be the reach between Joseph himself and the omnipotent master?

He passed in the track of Joseph toward the rear of the *patio*. Presently the big negro halted, removed his hat, and faced a door beneath the arcade. It was only a momentary interruption. He went on again at once, replacing his hat, but the thrill of apprehension was still tingling in the blood of the gambler. Now they went under the arcade, through an open door, and issued in the rear of the house, Connor's imaginary "monster" dissolved.

For they stood in front of a blacksmith shop, the side toward them being entirely open so that Connor could see the whole of the interior. Two sooty lanterns hung from the rafters, the light tangling among wreaths of smoke above and showing below a man whose back was turned toward them as he worked a great snoring bellows with one hand.

That bellows was the source of the mysterious breathing. Connor chuckled; all mysteries dissolved as this had done the moment one confronted them. He left off chuckling to admire the ease with which the blacksmith handled the bellows. A massive angle of iron was buried in the forge, the white flames spurting around it as the bellows blew, casting the smith into high relief at every pulse of the fire. Sometimes it ran on the great muscles of the arm that kept the bellows in play; sometimes it ran a dazzling outline around his entire body, showing the leather apron and the black hair which flooded down about his shoulders.

"Who—" began Connor.

"Hush," cautioned Joseph in a whisper. "David speaks when he chooses—not sooner."

Here the smith laid hold on the iron with long pincers, and, raising it from the coals, at once the shop burst with white light as David placed the iron on the anvil and caught up a short-handled sledge. He whirled it and brought it down with a clangor. The sparks spurted into the night, dropping to the ground and turning red at the very feet of Connor. Slowly David turned the iron, the steady shower of blows bending it, changing it, molding it under the eye of the gambler. This was that clangor which had floated through the clear mountain air to him when he first gazed down on the valley; this was the bell-like murmur which had washed down to him through the gates of the valley.

At least it was easy to understand why the negroes feared him. A full fourteen pounds was in the head of that sledge, Connor guessed, yet David whirled it with a light and deft precision. Only the shuddering of the anvil told the weight of those blows. Meantime, with every leap of the spark-showers the gambler studied the face of the master. They were features of strength rather than beauty from the frowning forehead to the craggy jaw. A sort of fierce happiness lived in that face now, the thought of the craftsman and the joy of the laborer in his strength.

As the white heat passed from the iron and it no longer flowed into a shape so

readily under the hammer of the smith, a change came in him. Connor knew nothing of ironcraft, but he guessed shrewdly that another man would have softened the metal with fire again at this point. Instead, David chose to soften it with strength. The steady patter of blows increased to a thundering rain as the iron turned a dark and darker red.

The rhythm of the worker grew swifter, did not break, and Connor watched with a keen eye of appreciation. Just as a great thoroughbred makes its supreme effort in the stretch by a lengthening and slight quickening of stride, but never a dropping into the choppy pace of unskilled labor at speed, so the man at the anvil was now rocking steadily back and forth from heel to toe, the knees unflexing a little as he struck and stiffening as he swung up the hammer. The greater effort was told only by the greater ring of the hammer face on the hardening iron—by that and by the shudder of the arm of the smith as the fourteen pounds went clanging home to the stroke.

And now the iron was quite dark—the smith stood with the ponderous sledge poised above his head and turned the bar swiftly, with study, to see that the angle was exactly what he wished. The hammer did not descend again on the iron; the smith was content, and plunging the big angle iron into the tempering tub, his burly shoulders were obscured for a moment by a rising cloud of steam.

He stepped out of this and came directly to them. Now the lantern was behind him, he was silhouetted in black, a mighty figure. He was panting from his labor, and the heavy sound of his breathing disturbed the gambler. He had expected to find a wise and simple old man in David. Instead, he was face to face with a Hercules.

His attention was directed entirely to Joseph.

"I come from my work unclean," he said. "Joseph, take the stranger within and wait."

Joseph led back into the *patio* to a plain wooden table beside which Connor, at the gesture of invitation, sat down. Here Joseph left him hurriedly, and the gambler

looked about. The arcade was lightened by a flagging of crystalline white stone, and the ceiling was inlaid with the same material. But the arches and the wall of the building were of common dobe, massive, but roughly built.

Beyond the fountain nodded like a ghost in the *patio*, and now and then, when the lantern was swayed by the wind, the pool glinted and was black again. The silence was beginning to make him feel more than ever like an unwelcome guest when another old negro came, and Connor noted with growing wonder the third of these black ancients. Each of them must have been in youth a fine specimen of manhood. Even in white-headed age they retained some of that noble countenance which remains to those who have once been strong. This fellow bore a tray upon his arm, and in the free hand carried a large yellow cloth of a coarse weave.

He placed on the table a wooden trencher with a great loaf of white bread, a cone of clear honey, and an earthen pitcher of milk. Next he put a wooden bowl on a chair beside Connor, and when the latter obediently extended his hand, the old negro poured warm water over them and dried them with a napkin.

There was a ceremony about this that fitted perfectly with the surroundings, and Connor became thoughtful. He was to tempt the master with the wealth of the world, but what could he give the man to replace this Homeric comfort?

In the midst of these reflections soft steps approached him, and he saw the brown-faced David coming in a shapeless blouse and trousers of rough cloth, with moccasins on his feet. Rising to meet his host, he was surprised to find that David had no advantage in height and a small one in breadth of shoulder in the blacksmith shop; he had seemed a giant. The brown man stopped beside the table. He seemed to be around thirty, but because of the unwrinkled forehead Connor decided that he was probably five years older.

"I am David," he said, without offering his hand.

"I," said the gambler, "am Benjamin."

There was a flash that might have been

either pleasure or suspicion in the face of David.

"Joseph has told me what has passed between you," he said.

"I hope he's broken no law by letting me come in."

"My will is the law; in disregarding me he has broken a law."

He made a sign above his shoulder that brought Joseph hurrying out of the gloom, his keen little eyes fastened upon the face of the master with intolerable anxiety. There was another sign from David, and the negro, without a glance at Connor, snatched the ivory head out of his pocket, thrust it upon the table, and stood back, watching the brown man with fascination.

"You see," went on David, "that he returns to you the price which you paid him. Therefore you have no longer a right to remain in the Garden of Eden."

Connor flushed. "If this were a price," he answered, clinging as closely as he could to language as simple and direct as that of David, "it could be returned to me. But it is not a price. It is a gift, and gifts cannot be returned."

He held out the ape-head, and when Joseph could see nothing save the face of David, he pushed the trinket back toward the negro.

"Then," said the brown man, "the fault which was small before is now grown large."

He looked calmly upon Joseph, and the giant quailed. By the table hung a gong on which the master tapped; one of the ancient servants appeared instantly.

"Go to my room," said David, "and bring me the largest nugget from the chest."

The old man disappeared, and while they waited for his return the little bright eyes of Joseph went to and fro on the face of the master; but David was staring into the darkness of the *patio*. The servant brought a nugget of gold, as large as the doubled fist of a child, and the master rolled it across the table to Connor.

A tenseness about his mouth told the gambler that much was staked on this acceptance. He turned the nugget in his hand, noting the discoloration of the ore from which it had been taken.

"It is a fine specimen," he said.

"You will see," said David, "both its size and weight."

And Connor knew; it was an exchange for the ivory head. He laid the nugget carelessly back upon the table, thankful that the gift had been offered with such suspicious bluntness.

"It is a fine specimen," he repeated, "but I am not collecting."

There was a heavy cloud on the face of David as he took up the nugget and passed it into the hand of the waiting servant; but his glance was for Joseph, not Connor.

The negro burst into speech for the first time, and the words tumbled out.

"I do not want it. I shall not keep it. See, David; I give it up to him!" He made a gesture with both hands as though he would push away the ape-head forever.

The master looked earnestly at Connor. "You hear?"

The latter shrugged his shoulders, saying: "I've never taken back a gift, and I can't begin now."

Connor's heart was beating rapidly, from the excitement of the strange interview and the sense of his narrow escape from banishment. Because he had made the gift to Joseph he had an inalienable right, it seemed, to expect some return from Joseph's master—even permission to stay in the valley, if he insisted.

There was another of those uncomfortable pauses, with the master looking sternly into the night.

"Zacharias," he said.

The servant stepped beside him.

"Bring the whip—and the cup."

The eyes of Zacharias rolled once toward Joseph and then he was gone, running; he returned almost instantly with a seven foot blacksnake, oiled until it glistened. He put it in the hand of David, but only when Joseph stepped back, shuddering, and then turned and kneeled before David, the significance of that whip came home to Connor, sickening him. The whites of Joseph's eyes rolled at him and Connor stepped between the negro and the whip.

"Do you mean this?" he gasped. "Do you mean to say that you are going to flog that poor fellow because he took a gift from me?"

"From you it was a gift," answered the master, perfectly calm, "but to him it was a price. And to me it is a great trouble."

"God!" murmured Connor.

"Do you call on him?" asked the brown man severely. "He is only here in so far as I am the agent of his justice. Yet I trust it is not more His will than it is the will of David. Also, the heart of Joseph is stubborn and must be humbled. Tears are the sign of contrition, and the whip shall not cease to fall until Joseph weeps."

His glance pushed Connor back; the gambler saw the lash whirled, and he turned his back sharply before it fell. Even so, the impact of the lash on flesh cut into Connor, for he had only to take back the gift to end the flogging. He set his teeth. Could he give up his only hold on David and the Eden Grays? By the whizzing of the lash he knew that it was laid on with the full strength of that muscular arm. Now a horrible murmur from the throat of Joseph forced him to turn against his will.

The face of David was filled, not with anger, but with cruel disdain; under his flying lash the welts leaped up on the back of Joseph, but the negro, with his eyes shut and his head strained far back, endured. Only through his teeth, each time he drew breath, came that stifled moan, and he shuddered at each impact of the whip. Now his eyes opened, and through the mist of pain a brutal hatred glimmered at Connor. That flare of rage seemed to sap the last of his strength, for now his face convulsed, tears flooded down, and his head dropped. Instantly the hand of David paused.

Something had snapped in Connor at the same time that the head of Joseph fell, and while he wiped the wet from his face he only vaguely saw Joseph hurry down the corridor, with Zacharias carrying the whip behind.

But the master? There was neither cruelty nor anger in his face as he turned to the table and filled with milk the wooden cup which Zacharias had brought.

"This is my prayer," he said quietly, "that in the justice of David there may never be the poison of David's wrath."

He drained the cup, broke a morsel of

bread from the loaf and ate it. Next he filled the second cup and handed it to the gambler.

"Drink."

Automatically Connor obeyed.

"Eat."

In turn he tasted the bread.

"And now," said the master, in the deep, calm voice, "you have drunk with David in his house, and he has broken bread with you. Hereafter may there be peace and good will between us. You have given a free gift to one of my people, and he who gives clothes to David's people keeps David from the shame of nakedness; and he who puts bread in the mouths of David's servants feeds David himself. Stay with me, therefore, Benjamin, until you find in the Garden the thing you desire, then take it and go your way. But until that time, what is David's is Benjamin's; your will be my will, and my way be your way."

He paused.

"And now Benjamin, you are weary?"

"Very tired."

"Follow me."

It seemed well to Connor to remove himself from the eye of the master as soon as possible. Not that the host showed signs of anger, but just as one looks at a clear sky and forebodes hard weather because of misty horizons, so the gambler guessed the frown behind David's eyes. He was glad to turn into the door which was opened for him. But even though he guessed the danger, Connor could not refrain from tempting Providence with a speech of double meaning.

"You are very kind," he said. "Good night, David."

"May God keep you until the morning, Benjamin."

CHAPTER XII.

HANEEMAR.

FROM the house of David Joseph skulked down the terraces until he came to the two long buildings and entered the smaller of these. He crossed a *patio*, smaller than the court of David's house; but there, too, was the fountain in

the center and the cool flooring of turf. Across this, and running under the dimly lighted arcade, Joseph reached a door which he tore open, slammed behind him again, and with his great head fallen upon his chest, stared at a little withered negro who sat on a stool opposite the door. It was rather a low bench of wood than a stool; for it stood not more than six inches above the level of the floor. His shoes off, and his bare feet tucked under his legs, he sat tailorwise and peered up at the giant. The sudden opening of the door had set his loose blouse fluttering about the old man's skeleton body. The sleeves fell back from bony forearms with puckered skin. He was less a man than a receptacle of time. His temples sank in like the temples of a very old horse; his toothless mouth was crushed together by the pressure of the long bony jaw, below which the skin hung in a flap. Compared with the polished ebony of Joseph, his black skin was covered with a thick dusting of gray. But the fire still glimmered in the hollows of his eyes. A cheerful spirit lived in the grasshopper body. He was knitting with a pair of slender needles, never looking at his work, nor during the interview with Joseph did he once slacken his pace. The needles clicked with such swift precision that the work grew perceptibly, flowing slowly under the hands of the negro.

Meanwhile this death's head looked at the giant so steadily that Joseph seemed to regret his unceremonious entrance. He stood back against the door, fumbling its knob for a moment, but then his rage mastered him once more, and he burst into the tale of Connor's coming and the ivory head. He brought his story to an end by depositing the trinket before the ancient man and then stood back, his face still working, and waited with every show of confident curiosity.

As for the antique, his knitting needles continued to fly, but to view the little carving more closely he cranned his skinny neck. At that moment, with his fallen features, his fleshless nose, his wide, deformed mouth, he was a grinning mummy head. He remained gloating over the little image so long that Joseph stirred uneasily; but finally the gro-

tesque lifted his head. It at once fell far back, the neck muscles apparently unable to support its weight. He looked more at the ceiling than at Joseph. His speech was a writhing of the lips about the black hollow of the mouth and the voice a hollow murmur.

"This," he said, "is the face of a great suhman. It is the face of the great suhman, Haneemar. It was many years ago that I knew him. It was a time so long ago that I do not know how to tell you. It was before your birth and the birth of your father. It was when I lived naked in a green country where the air is thick and sweet and the sun burns. There I knew Haneemar. He is a strong suhman. You see, his eyes are green; that is because he has the strength of the great snake that ties its tail around a branch and hangs down with its head as high as the breast of a man. Those snakes kill an antelope and eat it at a mouthful. Their eyes are green and so are the eyes of Haneemar. And you see that Haneemar has golden teeth. That is because he has eaten wisdom. He knows the meat of all things like a nut he can crack between his teeth. He is as strong as the snake which eats monkeys, and he is as wise as the monkeys that run from the snake and throw sticks from the tops of the trees. That is Haneemar.

"There is no luck for the man who carries the face of Haneemar with him. That is why David used the whip. He knew Haneemar. Also, in the other days I remember that when a child was sick in the village they tied a goat in the forest and Haneemar came and ate the goat. If he ate the goat like a lion and left tooth marks on the bones then the child got well and lived. If he ate the goat like a panther and left the guts the child died. But if the goat was not eaten for one day then Haneemar came and ate the child instead. I remember this. There will be no luck for you while you carry Haneemar."

The big negro had heard this speech with eyes that grew rounder and rounder. Now he caught up the little image and raised his arm to throw it through the window. But the old man hissed, and Joseph turned with a shudder.

"You cannot throw Haneemar away," said the other. "Only when some one takes him freely will you be rid of him."

"It is true," answered Joseph. "I remember the white man would not take him back."

"Then," said the old sage, "if the white man will not take him back, bad luck has come into the Garden, for only the white man would carry Haneemar out again. But do not give Haneemar to one of our friends, for then he will stay with us all. If you dig a deep hole and bury him in it, Haneemar may not be able to get out."

Joseph was beginning to swell with wrath. "The white man has put a curse on me," he said. "Abraham, what shall I do to him? Teach me a curse to put on him!"

"Hush!" answered Abraham. "Those who pray to evil spirits are the slaves of the powers they pray to."

"Then I shall take this Benjamin in my hands!"

He made a gesture as though he were snapping a stick of dry wood.

"You are the greater fool. Is not this Benjamin, this stranger, a guest of the master?"

"I shall steal him away by night in such a manner that he shall not make even the noise of a mouse when the cat breaks its back. I shall steal him away and David will never know."

The loose eyelids of the old man puckered and his glance became a ray of light.

"The curse already works; Haneemar already is in your mind, Joseph. David will not know? Child, there is nothing that he does not know. He uses us. We are his tools. My mind is to him as my hand is to me. He comes inside my eyes; he knows what I think. And if old Abraham is nothing before David, what is Joseph? Hush! Let not a whisper go out! Do not even dare to think it. You have felt the whip of David, but you have not felt his hand when he is in anger. A wounded mountain lion is not so terrible as the rage of David; he would be to you as an ax at the root of a sapling. These things have happened before. I remember. Did not Boram once anger John? And was not Boram as great as Joseph? And did not John take Boram

in his hands and conquer him and break him? Yes, and David is a greater body and a stronger hand than John. Also, his anger is as free as the running of an untaught colt. Remember, my son!"

Joseph stretched out his enormous arms and his voice was a broken wail.

"Oh, Abraham, Abraham, what shall I do?"

"Wait," said the old man quietly. "For waiting makes the spirit strong. Look at Abraham! His body has been dead these twenty years, but still his spirit lives."

"But the curse of Haneemar, Abraham?"

"Haneemar is patient. Let Joseph be patient also."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIRACLE.

CONNOR awakened in the gray hour of the morning, but beyond the window the world was much brighter than his room. The pale terraces went down to scattered trees, and beyond the trees was the water of the lake. Farther still the mountains rolled up into a brighter morning. A horse neighed out of the dawn; the sound came ringing to Connor, and he was suddenly eager to be outside.

In the *patio* the fountain was still playing. As for the house, he found it far less imposing than it had been when lantern light picked out details here and there. The walls and the clumsy arches were the disagreeable color of dried mud and all under the arcade was dismal shadow. But the lawn was already a faintly shining green, and the fountain went up above the ground shadow in a column of light. He passed on. The outside wall had that squat, crumbling appearance which every one knows who has been in Mexico—and through an avenue of trees he saw the two buildings between which he had ridden the night before. From the longer a negro was leading one of the gray horses. This, then, was the stable; the building opposite it was a duplicate on a smaller scale of the house of David, and must be the servants' quarters.

Connor went on toward a hilltop which

alone topped the site of the master's house; the crest was naked of trees, and over the tops of the surrounding ones Connor found that he commanded a complete view of the valley. The day before, looking from the far-off mountaintop, it had seemed to be a straight line very nearly, from the north to the south; now he saw that from the center both ends swung westward. The valley might be twelve miles long, and two or three wide, fenced by an unbroken wall of cliffs. Over the northern barrier poured a white line of water, which ran on through the valley in a river that widened above David's house into a spacious lake three or four miles long. The river began again from the end of the lake and continued straight to the base of the southern cliffs. Roads followed the swing of the river closely on each side, and the stream was bridged at each end of the lake. His angle of vision was so small that both extremities of the valley seemed a solid forest, but in the central portion he made out broad meadow lands and plowed fields checkering the groves. The house, as he had guessed the evening before, stood into the lake on a slender peninsula. And due west a narrow slit of light told of the gate into the Garden. It gave him a curiously confused emotion, as of a prisoner and spy in one.

He had walked back almost to the edge of the clearing when David, from the other side, went up to the crest of the hill. Connor was already among the trees and he watched unobserved. The master of the Garden, at the top of the hill, paused and turned toward Connor. The gambler flushed; he was about to step out and hail his host when a second thought assured him that he could not have been noticed behind that screen of shrubbery and trunks; moreover the glance of David Eden passed high above him. It might have been the cry of a hawk that made him turn so sharply; but through several minutes he remained without moving either hand or head, and as though he were waiting. Even in the distance Connor marked the smile of happy expectation. If it had been another place and another man Connor would have thought it a lover waiting for his mistress.

But, above all, he was glad of the oppor-

tunity to see David and remain unseen. He realized that the evening before it had been difficult to look directly into David's face. He had carried away little more than impressions; of strength, dignity, a surface calm and strong passions under it; but now he was able to see the face. It was full of contradiction; a profile irregular and deeply cut, but the full face had a touch of nobility that made it almost handsome.

As he watched, Connor thought he detected a growing excitement in David—his head was raised, his smile had deepened. Perhaps he came here to rejoice in his possessions; but a moment later Connor realized that this could not be the case, for the gaze of the other must be fixed as high as the mountain peaks.

At that instant came the revelation; there was a stiffening of the whole body of David; his breast filled and he swayed forward and raised almost on tiptoe. Connor, by sympathy, grew tense—and then the miracle happened. Over the face of David fell a sudden radiance. His hair, dull black the moment before, now glistened with light, and the swarthy skin became a shining bronze; his lips parted as though he drank in strength and happiness out of that miraculous light.

The hard-headed Connor was staggered. Back on his mind rushed a score of details, the background of this picture. He remembered the almost superhuman strength of Joseph; he saw again the old negroes withering with many years, but still bright-eyed, straight and agile. Perhaps they, too, knew how to stand here and drink in a mysterious light which filled their outworn bodies with youth of the spirit, at least. And David? Was not this the reason that he scorned the world? Here was his treasure past reckoning, this fountain of youth. Here was the explanation, too, of that intolerable brightness of his eye. The gambler bowed his head.

When he looked up again his soul had traveled higher and lower in one instant than it had ever moved before; he was staring like a child. Above all, he wanted to see the face of David again, to examine that mysterious change, but the master was already walking down the hill and had al-

most reached the circle of the trees on the opposite side of the slope. But now Connor noted a difference everywhere surrounding him. The air was warmer; the wind seemed to have changed its fiber; and then he saw that the treetops opposite him were shaking and glistening in a glory of light. Connor went limp and leaned against a tree, laughing weakly, silently.

"Hell," he said at length, recovering himself. "It was only the sunrise! And me—I thought—"

He began to laugh again, aloud, and the sound was caught up by the hillside and thrown back at him in a sharp echo. Connor went thoughtfully back to the house. In the *patio* he found the table near the fountain laid with a cloth, the wood scrubbed white, and on it the heavy earthenware. David Eden came in with the calm, the same eye, difficult to meet. Indeed, then and thereafter when he was with David, he found himself continually looking away, and resorting to little maneuvers to divert the glance of his host.

"Good morrow," said David.

"I have kept you waiting?" asked Connor.

The master paused to make sure that he had understood the speech, then replied:

"If I had been hungry I should have eaten."

There was no rebuff in that quiet statement, but it opened another door to Connor's understanding.

"Take this chair," said David, moving it from the end of the table to the side. "Sitting here you can look through the gate of the *patio* and down to the lake. It is not pleasant to have four walls about one; but that is a thing which Isaac cannot understand."

The gambler nodded, and to show that he could be as unceremonious as his host, sat down without further words. He immediately felt awkward, for David remained standing. He broke a morsel from the loaf of bread, which was yet the only food on the table, and turned to the East with a solemn face.

"Out of His hands from whom I take this food," said the master—"into His hands I give myself."

He sat down in turn, and Isaac came instantly with the breakfast. It was an astonishing menu to one accustomed to toast and coffee for the morning meal. On a great wooden platter which occupied half the surface of the table, Isaac put down two chickens, roasted brown. A horn-handled hunting knife, razor sharp, was the only implement at each place, and fingers must serve as forks. To David that was a small impediment. Under the deft edge of his knife the breast of one chicken divided rapidly; he ate the white slices like bread. Indeed, the example was easy to follow; the mountain air had given him a vigorous appetite, and when Connor next looked up it was at the sound of glass tinkling. He saw Isaac holding toward the master a bucket of water in which a bottle was immersed almost to the cork; David tried the temperature of the water with his fingers with a critical air, and then nodded to Isaac, who instantly drew the cork. A moment later red wine was trickling into Connor's cup. He viewed it with grateful astonishment, but David, poisoning his cup, looked across at his guest with a puzzled air.

"In the old days," he said gravely, "when my masters drank they spoke to one another in a kindly fashion. It is now five years since a man has sat at my table, and I am moved to say this to you, Benjamin: it is pleasant to speak to another not as a master who must be obeyed, but as an equal who may be answered, and this is my wish, that if I have doubts of Benjamin, and unfriendly thoughts, they may disappear with the wine we drink."

"Thank you," said Connor, and a thrill went through him as he met the eye of David. "That wish is my wish also—and long life to you, David."

There was a glint of pleasure in the face of David, and they drank together.

"By Heaven," cried Connor, putting down the cup, "it is Médoc! It is Château Lafite, upon my life!"

He tasted it again.

"And the vintage of '96! Is that true?"

David shook his head.

"I have never heard of Médoc or Château Lafite."

"At least," said Connor, raising his cup

and breathing the delicate bouquet, "this wine is Bordeaux you imported from France? The grapes which made this never grew outside of the Gironde!"

But David smiled.

"In the north of the Garden," he said, "there are some low rolling hills, Benjamin; and there the grapes grow from which we make this wine."

Connor tasted the claret again. His respect for David had suddenly mounted; the hermit seemed nearer to him.

"You grew these grapes in your valley?" he repeated softly.

"This very bottle we are drinking," said David, warming to the talk. "I remember when the grapes of this vintage were picked; I was a boy, then."

"I believe it," answered Connor solemnly, and he raised the cup with a reverent hand, so that the sun filtered into the red and filled the liquid with dancing points of light.

"It is a full twenty years old."

"It is twenty-five years old, said David calmly, "and this is the best vintage in ten years." He sighed. "It is now in its perfect prime and next year it will not be the same. You shall help me finish the stock, Benjamin."

"You need not urge me," smiled Connor. He shook his head again.

"But that is one wine I could have vowed I knew—Médoc. At least, I can tell you the soil it grows in."

The brows of the host raised; he began to listen intently.

"It is a mixture of gravel, quartz and sand, continued Connor.

"True!" exclaimed David, and looked at his guest with new eyes.

"And two feet underneath there is a stone for subsoil which is a sort of sand or fine gravel cemented together."

David struck his hands together, frankly delighted.

"This is marvelous," he said, "I would say you have seen the hills."

"I paid a price for what I know," said Connor rather gloomily. "But north of Bordeaux in France there is a strip of land called the Médoc—the finest wine soil in the world, and there I learned what claret

may be—there I tasted Château Lafite and Château Datour. They are both grown in the commune of Pauillac."

"France?" echoed David, with the misty eyes of one who speaks of a lost world. "Ah, you have traveled?"

"Wherever fine horses race," said Connor, and turned back to the chicken.

"Think," said David suddenly, "for five years I have lived in silence. There have been voices about me, but never mind; and now you here, and already you have taken me at a step half-way around the world."

"Ah, Benjamin, it is possible for an emptiness to be in a manlike hunger, you understand, and yet different—and nothing but a human voice can fill the space."

"Have you no wish to leave your valley for a little while and see the world?" said Connor, carelessly.

He watched gloomily, while an expression of strong distaste grew on the face of David. He was still frowning when he answered:

"We will not speak of it again."

He jerked his head up and cleared away his frown with an effort.

"To speak with one man in the Garden—that is one thing," he went on, "but to hear the voices of two jabbering and gibbering together—grinning like mindless creatures—throwing their hands out to help their words, as poor Joseph does—bah, it is like drinking new wine; it makes one's head swim and the stomach stick."

"Five times?" said Connor. "You have traveled a good deal, then?"

"Too much," sighed David. "And each time I returned from Parkin Crossing I have cared less for what lies outside the valley."

"Parkin Crossing?"

"I have been told that there are five hundred people in the city," said David, pronouncing the number slowly. "But when I was there I was never able to count more than fifty, I believe."

Connor found it necessary to cough.

"And each time you have left the valley you have gone no farther than Parkin Crossing?" he asked mildly, his spirits rising.

"And is not that far enough?" replied

the master, frowning. "It is a ride between dawn and dark."

"What is that in miles?"

"A hundred and thirty miles," said David, "or thereabout."

Connor closed his eyes twice and then: "You rode that distance between dawn and dark?"

"Yes."

"Over these mountains most of the way?" he continued gently.

"About half the distance," answered David.

"And how long"—queried Connor hoarsely—"how long before your horse was able to make the trip back after you had ridden a hundred and thirty miles in twelve hours?"

"The next day," said David, "I always return."

"In the same time?"

"In the same time," said David.

To doubt that simple voice was impossible. But Connor knew horses, and his credence was strained to the breaking point.

"I should like very much," he said, "to see a horse that had covered two hundred and sixty miles within forty-eight hours."

"Thirty-six," corrected David.

Connor swallowed.

"Thirty-six," he murmured faintly.

"I shall send for him," said the master, and struck the little gong which stood on one side of the table. Isaac came hurrying with that light step which made Connor forget his age.

"Bring Glani," said David.

Isaac hurried across the *patio*, and David continued talking to his guest.

"Glani is not friendly; but you can see him from a distance."

"And yet," said Connor, "the other horses in the Garden seem as friendly as pet dogs. Is Glani naturally vicious?"

"His is of other blood," replied David. "He is the blood of the great mare Rustir, and all in her line are meant for one man only. He is more proud than all the rest."

He leaned back in his chair and his face, naturally stern, grew tender.

"Since he was foaled no hand has touched him except mine; no other has ridden him, groomed him, fed him."

"I'll be glad to see him," said Connor quietly. "For I have never yet found a horse which would not come to my hand."

As he spoke, he looked straight into the eyes of David, with an effort, and at the same time took from the pocket of his coat a little bulbous root which was always with him. A Viennese who came from a life half spent in the Orient had given him a small box of those herbs as a priceless present. For the secret was that when the root was rubbed over the hands it left a faint odor on the skin, like freshly cut apples; and to a horse that perfume was irresistible. They seemed to find in it a picture of sweet clover, blossoming, and clean oats finely headed; yet to the nostrils of a man the scent was barely perceptible. Under cover of the table the gambler rubbed his hands swiftly with the little root and dropped it back into his pocket. That was the secret of the power over Abra which had astonished the two old negroes at the gate. A hundred times, in stable and paddock, Connor had gone up to the most intractable race horses and looked them over at close hand, at his leisure. The master seemed in nowise disturbed by the last remark of Connor.

"That is true of old Abraham, also," he said. "There was never a cold foaled in the valley which Abraham had not been able to call away from its mother; he can read the souls of them all with a touch of his withered hands. Yes, I have seen that twenty times. But with Glani it is different. He is as proud as a man; he is fierce as a wolf; and Abraham himself cannot touch the neck of my horse. Look!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CONQUEST.

UNDER the arch of the entrance Connor saw a gray stallion, naked of halter or rope, with his head raised. From the shadow he came shining into the sunlight; the wind raised his mane and tail in ripples of silver. Ben Connor rose slowly from his chair. Horses were religion to him; he felt now that he had stepped into the inner shrine.

When he was able to speak he turned slowly toward David. "Sir," he said hoarsely, "that is the greatest horse ever bred."

It was far more than a word of praise; it was a confession of faith which surrounded the moment and the stallion with solemnity, and David flushed like a proud boy.

"There he stands," he said. "Now make him come to your hand."

It recalled Connor to his senses, that challenge, and feeling that his mind had been snatched away from him for a moment, almost that he had been betrayed, he looked at David with a pale face.

"He is too far away," he said. "Bring him closer."

There was one of those pauses which often come before crises, and Connor knew that by the outcome of this test he would be judged either a man or a cheap boaster.

"I shall do this thing," said the master of the Garden of Eden. "If you bring Glani to your hand I shall give him to you to ride while you stay in the valley. Listen! No other man had so much as laid a hand on the withers of Glani, but if you can make him come to you of his own free will—"

"No," said Connor calmly. "I shall make him come because my will is stronger than his."

"Impossible!" burst out David.

He controlled himself and looked at Connor with an almost wistful defiance.

"I hold to this," he said. "If you can bring Glani to your hand, he is yours while you stay in the Garden—for my part, I shall find another mount."

Connor slipped his right hand into his pocket and crushed the little root against the palm.

"Come hither, Glani," commanded the master. The stallion came up behind David's chair, looking fearlessly at the stranger.

"Now," said David with scorn. "This is your time."

"I accept it," replied Connor.

He drew his hand from his pocket, and leaning over the table, he looked straight into the eye of the stallion. But in reality,

it was only to bring that right hand closer; the wind was stirring behind him, and he knew that it wafted the scent of the mysterious root straight to Glani.

"That is impossible," said David, following the glance of Connor with a frown. "A horse has no reasoning brain. Silence cannot make him come to you."

"However," said Connor carelessly, "I shall not speak."

The master set his teeth over unuttered words, and glancing up to reassure himself, his face altered swiftly, and whispered:

"Now, you four dead masters, bear witness to this marvel! Glani feels the influence!"

For the head of Glani had raised as he scented the wind. Then he circled the table and came straight toward Connor. Within a pace, the scent of strange humanity must have drowned the perfume of the root; he sprang away, catlike and snorted his suspicion.

David heaved a great sigh of relief.

"You fail!" he cried, and snatching up a bottle of wine, he poured out a cup. "Brave Glani! I drink this in your honor!"

Every muscle in David's strong body was quivering, as though he were throwing all the effort of his will on the side of the stallion.

"You think I have failed?" asked Connor softly.

"Admit it," said David.

His flush was gone and he was paler than Connor now; he seemed to desire with all his might that the test should end; there was a fiber of entreaty in his voice.

"Admit it, Benjamin, as I admit your strange power."

"I have hardly begun. Give me quiet."

David flung himself into his chair, his attention jerking from Glani to Connor and back. It was at this critical moment that a faint breeze puffed across the *patio*, carrying the imperceptible fragrance of the root straight to Glani. Connor watched the stallion prick his eyes, and he blessed the quaint old Viennese with all his heart.

The first approach of Glani had been in the nature of a feint, but now that he was sure, he went with all the directness of unspoiled courage straight to the stranger.

He lowered the beautiful head and thrust out his nose until it touched the hand of Connor. The gambler saw David shudder.

"You have conquered," he said, forcing out the words. "Take Glani; to me he is now a small thing. He is yours while you stay in the Garden. Afterward I shall give him to one of my servants."

Connor stood up, and though at his rising Glani started back, he came to Connor again, following that elusive scent. To David it seemed the last struggle of the horse before completely submitting to the rule of a new master. He rose in turn, trembling with shame and anger, while Connor stood still, for about this stranger drifted a perfume of broad green fields with flowering tufts of grass, the heads well-seeded and sweet. And when a hand touched his withers, the stallion merely turned his head and nuzzled the shoulder of Connor inquisitively.

With his hand on the back of the horse, the gambler realized for the first time Glani's full stature. He stood at least fifteen-three, though his perfect proportions made him seem smaller at a distance. No doubt he was a giant among the Eden Grays, Connor thought to himself. The gallop on Abra the night before had been a great moment, but a ride on Glani was a prospect that took his breath. He paused. Perhaps it was the influence of a forgotten Puritan ancestor, casting a shade on every hope of happiness. With his weight poised for the leap to the back of the stallion, Connor looked at David. The master was in a silent agony, and the hand of Connor fell away from the horse. He was afraid.

"I can't do it," he said frankly.

"Jump on his back," urged David bitterly. "He is more to you than a yearling to the hands of Abraham."

Connor realized now how far he had gone; he set about retracing the wrong steps.

"It may appear that way, but I can't trust myself on his back. You understand?"

He stepped back with a gesture that sent Glani bounding away.

"You see," went on Connor, "I never could really understand him."

The master seized with eagerness upon this gratifying suggestion.

"It is true," he said, "that you are a little afraid of Glani. That is why none of the rest can handle him."

Hé stopped in the midst of his self-congratulation and directed at Connor one of those glances which the gambler could never learn to meet.

"Also," said David, "you make me happy. If you had sat on his back I should have felt your weight on my own shoulders and spirit."

He laid a hand on Connor's shoulder, but the gambler had won and lost too often with an impenetrable face to quail now. He even managed to smile.

"Hearken," said David. "My masters taught me many things, and everything they taught me must be true, for they were only voices of a mind out of another world. Yet, in spite of them," he went on kindly, "I begin to feel a kinship with you, Benjamin. Come, we will walk and talk together in the cool of the morning. Glani!"

The gray had wandered off to nibble at the turf; he whirled and came like a thrown lance.

"Glani," said David, "is usually the only living thing that walks with me in the morning; but now, my friend, we are three."

CHAPTER XV.

THE WARNING.

IN the mid-afternoon of that day Connor rested in his room, and David rested in the lake, floating with only his nose and lips out of water. Toward the center of the lake even the surface held the chill of the snows, but David floated in the warm shallows and looked up to the sky through a film of water. The tiny ripples became immense air waves that rushed from mountain to mountain, dashed the clouds up and down, and then left the heavens placid and windless.

He grew weary of this placidity, and as he turned upon one side he heard a prolonged hiss from the shore. David rolled with the speed of a water moccasin and

headed in with his arm flashing in a powerful stroke that presently brought him to the edge of the beach. He rose in front of old Abraham.

A painter should have seen them together—the time-dried body of the old negro and the exuberant youth of the master. He looked on the servant with a stern kindness.

"What are you doing here without a covering for your head while the sun is hot? Did they let you come of their own accord, Abraham?"

"I slipped away," chuckled Abraham. "Isaac was in the *patio*, but I went by him like a hawk-shadow. Then I ran among the trees. Hat? Well, no more have you a hat, David."

The master frowned, but his displeasure passed quickly and he led the way to the lowest terrace. They sat on the soft thick grass, with their feet in the hot sand of the beach, and as the wind stirred the tree above them a mottling of shadow moved across them.

"You have come to speak privately with me," said David. "What is it?"

But Abraham embraced his skinny knees and smiled at the lake, his jaw falling.

"It's not what it was," he said, and wagged his head. "It's a sad lake compared to what it was."

David controlled his impatience.

"Tell me how it is changed."

"The color," said the old man. "Why, once, with a gallon of that blue you could have painted the whole sky." He shaded his face to look up, but so doing his glance ventured through the branches and close to the white-hot circle of the sun. His head dropped and he leaned on one arm.

"Look at the green of the grass," suggested David. "It will rest your eyes."

"Do you think my eyes are weak? No, I dropped my head to think how the world has fallen off in the last fifty years. It was all different in the days of John. But that was before you came to the valley."

"The sky was not the same?" queried the master.

"And men, also," said Abraham instantly. "Ho, yes! John was a man; you will not see his like in these days."

David flushed, but he held back his first answer. "Perhaps."

"There is no 'perhaps.'"

Abraham spoke with a decision that brought his jaw close up under his nose.

"He is my master," insisted Abraham, and, smiling suddenly, he whispered: "Mah ol' Marse Johnnie Cracken!"

"What's that?" called David.

Abraham stared at him with unseeing eyes. A mist of years drifted between them, and now the old man came slowly out of the past and found himself seated on the lawn in a lonely valley with great, naked mountains piled around it.

"What did you say?" repeated David.

Abraham hastily changed the subject.

"In those days if a stranger came to the Garden of Eden he did not stay. Aye, and in those days Abraham could have taken the strongest by the neck and pitched him through the gates. I remember when the men came over the mountains—long before you were born. Ten men at the gate, I remember, and they had guns. But when my master told them to go away they looked at him and they looked at each other, but after a while they went away."

Abraham rocked in an ecstasy.

"No man could face my master. I remember how he sat on his horse that day."

"It was Rustir?" asked David eagerly.

"She was the queen of horses," replied the old negro indirectly, "and he was the king of men; there are no more men like my master, and there are no more horses like Rustir."

There was a pause, then David spoke.

"John was a good man and a strong man," he said, looking down at his own brown hands. "And Rustir was a fine mare, but it is foolish to call her the best."

"There was never a horse like Rustir," said the old man monotonously.

"Bah! What of Glani?"

"Yes, that is a good colt."

"A good colt! Come, Abraham! Have you ever opened your dim eyes and really looked at him? Name one fault."

"I have said Glani is a good colt," repeated Abraham, worried.

"Come, come! You have said Rustir was better."

"Glani is a good colt, but too heavy in the forehead. Far too heavy there."

The restraint of David snapped.

"It is false! Ephraim, Jacob, they all say that Glani is the greatest."

"They change like the masters," grumbled Abraham. "The servants change. They flatter and the master believes. But my master has an eye—he looked through a man like an eagle through mist. When I stood before my master my soul was naked; a wind blew through me. But I say John was one man; and there are no other horses like his mare Rustir. My master is silent; other men have words as heavy as their hands."

"Peace, Abraham, peace. You shame me. The Lord was far from me, and I spoke in anger, and I retract it."

"A word is a bullet that strikes men down, David. Let the wind blow on your face when your heart is hot."

"I confess my sin," said David, but his jaw was set.

"Confess your sins in silence."

"It is true."

He looked at Abraham as if he would be rid of him.

"You are angry to-day, Abraham."

"The law of the Garden has been broken."

"By whom?"

"David has unbarred the gate."

"Yes, to one man."

"It is enough."

"Peace, Abraham. You are old and look awry. This one man is no danger. I could break him in my hands—so!"

"A strong man may be hopeless against words," said the oracular old man. "With a word he may set you on fire."

"Do you think me a tinder and dry grass? Set me on fire with a word?"

"An old man who looks awry had done it with a word. And see—again!"

There was a silence filled only by the sound of David's breathing and the slow curling of the ripples on the beach.

"You try me sorely, Abraham."

"Good steel will bend, but not break."

"Say no more of this man. He is harmless."

"Is that a command, David?"

"No—but at least be brief."

"Then I say to you, David, that he has brought evil into the valley."

The master burst into sudden laughter that carried away his anger.

"He brought no evil, Abraham. He brought only the clothes on his back."

"The serpent brought into the first Garden only his skin and his forked tongue."

"There was a devil in that serpent."

"Aye, and what of Benjamin?"

"Tell me your proofs, and let them be good ones, Abraham."

"I am old," said the negro sadly, "but I am not afraid."

"I wait."

"Benjamin brought an evil image with him. It is the face of a great suhman, and he tempted Joseph with it, and Joseph fell."

"The trinket of carved bone?" asked David.

"The face of a devil! Who was unhappy among us until Benjamin came? But with his charm he bought Joseph, and now Joseph walks alone and thinks unholy thoughts, and when he is spoken to he looks up first with a snake's eye before he answers. Is not this the work of Benjamin?"

"What would you have me do? Joseph has already paid for his fault with the pain of the whip."

"Cast out the stranger, David."

David mused. At last he spoke. "Look at me, Abraham!"

The other raised his head and peered into the face of David, but presently his glance wavered and turned away.

"See," said David. "After Matthew died there was no one in the Garden who could meet my glance. But Benjamin is a mind, and he meets my eye and I feel his thoughts before he speaks them. He is pleasant to me, Abraham."

"The voice of the serpent was pleasant to Eve," said the negro.

The nostrils of David quivered.

"What is it that you call the trinket?"

"A great suhman. My people feared and worshiped him in the old days. A strong devil!"

"An idol!" said David. "What! Abraham, do you still worship sticks and stones?"

Have you been taught no more than that? Do you put a mind in the handiwork of a man?"

The head of Abraham fell.

"I am weak before you, David," he said. "I have no power to speak except the words of my master, which I remember. Now I feel you rise against me, and I am dust under your feet. Think of Abraham, then, as a voice in the wind, but hear that voice. I know, but I know not why I know, or how I know, there is evil in the valley, David. Cast it out!"

"I have broken bread and drunk milk with Benjamin. How can I drive him out of the valley?"

"Let him stay in the valley if you can keep him out of your mind. He is in your thoughts. He is with you like a shadow."

"He is not stronger than I," said the master.

"Evil is stronger than the greatest."

"It is cowardly to shrink from him before I know him."

"Have no fear of him—but of yourself. A wise man trembleth at his own strength."

"Tell me, Abraham—does the seed of

Rustir know men? Do they know good and evil?"

"Yes, for Rustir knew my master."

"And has Glani ever bowed his head for any man saving for me?"

"He is a stubborn colt. Aye, he troubled me!"

"But I tell you, Abraham, he came to the hand of Benjamin!"

The old negro blinked at the master.

"Then there was something in that hand," he said at last.

"There was nothing," said David in triumph. "I saw the bare palm."

"It is strange."

"You are wrong. Admit it."

"I must think, David."

"Yes," said the master kindly. "Here is my hand. Rise, and come with me to your house."

They went slowly, slowly up the terrace, Abraham clinging to the arm of the master.

"Also," said David, "he has come for only a little time. He will soon be gone. Speak no more of Benjamin."

"I have already spoken almost enough," said Abraham. "You will not forget."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

His Millstone by George M.A. Cain



IN the chief hut of a deserted native village on the banks of, perhaps, the wildest of earth's navigable rivers, a man sat on a pine box behind a larger one, upon which as a table he had spread a number

of closely figured sheets of paper. He went over these again and again, unable to convince himself of the results he got from the figures.

Occasionally he lifted his face and

passed a hand over it, as if to brush off invisible cobwebs. Sometimes the hand pressed hard on his temples. Even by the smoky lantern one might have seen the yellow of his forehead, the flush of his cheek, the dark circles around and the bloodshot whites of eyes it must have tortured to read in that feeble light.

Thus, burning with fever, aching in every limb, half blinded with the pain in his head, David Barless attained his vision of success. It was his hour of triumph.

But David Barless's face could not undo its creases of pain to display joy as the drawn jaws released the muttered words—

"We'll make it yet."

For any one else, for the chance stranger to whom he might have given hospitality, for one of the peons now sleeping in the hammocks of the other huts about—David Barless might have smiled. Alone he did not try. The one man for whom he always had forced a smile, and the one woman who might have forced one from him were thousands of miles away—he hoped.

The truth was that he could not believe his triumph. Too many other prospects had been snatched from him, too many near victories had turned to defeat. The figures promised such life as his unremitting toil might deserve. Instinct, trained by adversity, refused to believe the figures. Something akin to presentiment darkened the light of hope. A man with a more usual background in life might have attributed this to the fever. David Barless could not dare be sure his figures were not distorted by delirium.

And events proved that presentiment and instinct were right.

There was more concrete ground for doubt. Four weeks ago he had been unable to figure that he could finish here without fresh supplies of food. He had dispatched messengers to Mañaos. Two weeks should certainly have got the canoes down to the big business center of the jungle; half of that would have sufficed for the return of the launch he had ordered. Now he was calculating upon completing his work and the long tow to the nearest real town before his present supplies should be entirely exhausted.

And there was yet another reason for doubt. He felt it in the head he clutched with hot and quivering fingers; he saw it reflected from the broken bit of mirror before which he daily struggled with his razor to keep himself from forgetting civilization.

"We'll make it yet," he whispered through clenched teeth. But sometimes the words would end in a scarcely suppressed groan—

"Oh, God—if they'd only brought me up some quinine!"

His supply of that was exhausted.

II.

BUT it would take no mean illness to stop David Barless so near the threshold of real success. He had fought too hard when there was no hope to yield now, with victory in his grasp. Few men have carried on far in the race of life with such a handicap as he had borne.

David had a twin brother. At ten years of age the pair had resembled each other, loved each other, and quarreled about as thoroughly and vigorously as is the wont of twin brothers. David and Jonathan, the two had been named by parents inclined to the Biblical.

Some intimate who knew them well enough to distinguish them easily had once remarked that David was the better lover and Jonathan the better scrapper of the pair. But once a tussle broke to reverse this order. David, seldom angry, this time knocked his brother down.

He probably will not forget in all eternity his fright as Jonathan lay still, a tiny trickle of blood oozing from a cut on the back of the head which had struck on a sharp bit of gravel. He had no need for the stern accusation uttered by his father, who had come upon the scene as the one combatant fell:

"Now you've killed him."

A moment later, to David's vast but premature relief, Johnathan was howling proof to the contrary. But the mother arrived in time to salvage the disciplinary value of the incident—

"You've probably injured his brain. If

he lives, he may be crazy all the rest of his life. And you'll be responsible."

The doctor who stitched up the slight cut pooh-poohed the idea of any serious result of the blow.

"Doctors can't tell," the mother insisted, when she discovered that David was comforting himself about it. "Sometimes things like that don't show for years afterward."

Johnathan's injury had not taken so long showing. The day after he complained of more ache than the visible bump seemed to account for. He was kept at home from school for a week.

His mother could scarcely have believed the excuse she gave David for failure to inflict the usual punishments upon one or two boyish faults Jonathan committed during that week. Either boy would have been let off with light penalties under the mildest touch of malady.

"You'd give me a licking for that," David complained of unfairness, as is the manner of children.

"Jonathan isn't really well yet from the cut on his head," she answered. "Besides—there's no knowing if he's entirely responsible after such a blow as that."

But a month had brought misgivings and three months certainty to the mother that Jonathan's brain had been injured. It did not take much longer to convince the mother. Jonathan went swiftly from bad to worse. By the end of a year the hurt boy exhibited the sloven listlessness, the loose shuffle, the unkemptness, the lack of self-control, the sullen viciousness of disposition—of the defective.

There is no human affection beyond the reach of perversity. And mother-love goes wrong when its sentimentality entirely reverses the dictates of reason. Mrs. Barless refused absolutely to hear of putting her boy in any institution for the mentally afflicted.

She saved him from having the State place him where he belonged through the operation of truant laws. Jonathan was sent to private schools, and from one of these to another, until one was found of sufficiently low standard to keep any sort of paying pupil. David had to share the

changes. Sympathy for the weak son never let the strong one forget that he was responsible for the weakness.

The worst of schools had its limits. Jonathan reached a stage of badness where the makeshift master was compelled to choose between keeping the twins and having any other pupils. It was in their sixteenth year.

And the Barless fortunes, never a warrant for more than the education the State will supply to any fit child, had been reduced to a point where there was need for any help David could give. He found employment in the office of a lumber company.

David never, nowadays, pretended that he had been born with any inordinate taste for work. Ambition, in his case, had found vent in a very modest desire for a bicycle. To get it he walked to his work, he performed all manner of extra tasks outside his regular employment, he fairly devoured overtime.

Hitherto the conscious cost of David's assault upon his brother had consisted in countless fights to rescue Jonathan from the just resentment of other boys who refused to excuse the defective's viciously ugly and unoccasional attacks upon themselves. To David it came as a bolt from the blue that he might pay Jonathan's way out of troubles otherwise than with his fists and in coinage of blackened eyes and bruised features. The fifty dollars for the bicycle had been duly deposited in the bank; David was promising himself the pleasure of the purchase on the morrow, and his first long ride on the Saturday half-holiday—when Jonathan was arrested for throwing stones through thirty or forty windows of a vacant factory building.

David's bicycle money and his father's note for four times as much had saved Jonathan from criminal prosecution by the owner of the damaged building. Eighteen years afterward, sick, in a strange land of strange conditions, David could far more easily figure the exact amount of labor he could extract from fifty quarter-civilized Indian peons than he could have calculated what it had cost him to settle Jonathan's troubles.

To the end of her days the mother persisted in keeping Jonathan at home; she projected her persistence beyond her death by extracting David's promise to spare her ailing boy the real and imagined horrors of institutional life. Jonathan's crimes increased. Like many other mental deficients, he seemed as adept in evil as he was incapable of good. He developed downright cleverness in forging David's name to checks. The twin resemblance still served him in cashing them almost anywhere outside the banks where David kept his accounts. And his promise to his mother made David stand the losses. There were always petty thefts from others to settle up, mere wanton mischief to pay for, in spite of hired watchers at added expense, and doctors with infinite varieties of diagnoses and never a cure.

With all said and done, it is really a pretty wild-eyed theorist who will attempt to deny that, in this country, any man can make money who wants it badly enough to work for it. David, who had to have money, earned it. He became a very highly paid officer in the company he had helped to make. He dared not take a partnership, lest his brother's troubles involve the rest of the concern.

At last Jonathan overreached his brother's powers to protect him. He combined burglary, arson, and an all but fatal assault in one single criminal spasm. It stretched David's credit to the limit to save the defective from a long sentence at hard labor. Strangely, alienists differed as to whether Jonathan was insane at all; and David could not escape the fact that the only one who testified to certainty on the subject he had employed at a price to tempt professional probity. His lawyers congratulated him that they had saved his brother from the State hospital for the criminal insane.

He saw now that his present income was inadequate for further legal efforts to free the unfortunate. The best he could do was to provide every possible comfort and attention for Jonathan, pending the acquisition of a wealth that could stand high-priced litigations and the certain expenses their success would entail afterward.

But his present expenditures on Jonathan were as nothing to what it had cost him to have his brother at large. He quickly paid up the debts of the trial. He soon acquired such money as would have enabled him to support a family in comfort, had he not had other use for too much more. He saved it, invested it cautiously.

Then the after-war slump in business set his mind to a notion he had always entertained. His firm had specialized in South American fine woods. The spirit that had fought out his personal life-battle had never been quite content with the fact that the vastness of all earth's forests has, to the present time, remained of greatly impaired value to the rubber industry and of no value at all to the world's lumber market.

For years he had believed that great areas of the selvas of the upper Amazon basin could be cleared at sufficient profit to pay the expense of replanting to overcome the great obstacle of overluxuriousness of vegetation. The constant depletion of other timber resources and the inverse increase in cost of lumber are frequently enough depicted in charts with diagonal lines on checkers. Upon such charts David Barless's mind continually drew other lines to represent the best information he could gather as to the expenses of separating the useful and valuable woods from the less valuable and the utterly useless and the dense undergrowth of the selvas, the costs of labor and transportation, the requirements of big-scale sanitation. Every lumber man believes that the lines printed on the charts must some time cross the lines David's studying drew. He believed that time had already arrived.

The slump in business showed him that he had reached the limits of the position he had hitherto occupied. Only a bigger business could liberate Jonathan and keep him free. Besides that desire, David, with his care for his brother, reduced to routine visits and greatly modified expenses, developed the first really selfish ambitions he had allowed himself since his earliest disappointments.

Among the other things he had done for Jonathan had been the employing of a

nurse he had found in the office of a noted alienist. Ruth Hardwick had impressed him as a remarkably capable woman, with the qualities highly developed which we usually call motherly. She was born to soothe people of abnormally irate dispositions.

What it took time for David to discover was the fact that a man who has fought his kind of a fight to the age of thirty-five is as amenable to soothingly motherly dispositions as if his nerves were distorted with brain derangements. Ruth Hardwick had set him to dreaming things entirely apart from private sanatoriums for his brother.

And so, for the first time in his life, he gambled otherwise than on the certainty that Jonathan would eventually lose him all he might earn. He took all the money he could raise himself; he was able to get a little more from men who were as eager as he to be on the ground floor as pioneers in the vast future development of the greatest of all forests. They were ready to back him as the head of a great industry, if his first small experiment should demonstrate his figuring from hitherto second-hand information.

A year on the Javari, on land to be had for the claiming, had all but exhausted his close-calculated resources. That last order for supplies would leave barely enough to his credit in Mañaos to set him on down the Amazon. But he would tow down a great load of lumber, huge rafts of logs fastened together to serve as barges for great piles more. And these would guarantee the costs of their delivery in the marts of America with the margin of profit that would win the money for turning the experiment into the great industry he had dreamed of heading.

Success—this was what the figures on the pine box table spelled to him. The delay of the last load of supplies had left him half starved in the effort to live on entirely native food; for lack of quinine he was raging with jungle fever. But this was not the real reason why he could not smile.

Success had waited so long; success meant so much; success was so beyond his long experience of dragging his life mill-

stone with no other hope than that of dragging it to life's end—that he could not quite believe in success when he held it in his grasp. Instead, he looked up for the ghost of that childhood accident which had been magnified into a crime, reaching out its long arm to snatch from him again the fruits of his superhuman toil.

And the ghost stood before him.

Two or three times before he had looked out of the entirely open side of the shack which faced the river and its breeze, his gaze drawn by sounds of a canoe's paddles, the grating of its bottom on the slimy gravel of the beach, but unable to pierce the gloom beyond the dim light of his lantern. He had not been sure enough of the sounds to trouble to investigate them.

Slouching automatically to lean against the pillar in the middle of the open side of the hut, his whole figure a vision of that dense laziness which is utter lack of will to stiffen joints, Jonathan Barless leered down at him, his flabby lips wiggling a dangling cigarette as he greeted his brother with a grin that seemed to find some satisfaction in the consternation his appearance brought.

"'Lo, Dave—I gotcha at last. Takes more'n their —— iron bars to keep Jonathan away from David, eh? What's the matter? Ain't you glad to see me?" His slack shoulders heaved with silent, mocking laughter as David continued to stare through bloodshot eyes from which trembling hands were trying to brush aside some impossible vision.

The Indian boatman who had brought him dodged past as if fearful of a kick or blow, and nervously extended some envelopes in his grimy hands to David.

"The hell with those!" snarled Jonathan. "I can tell you what they're about, I reckon. One's from that bank to tell you your account's overdrawn up at Mañaos; an' that one's from that big store where they thought I was you and wanted to know what you wanted to do about paying for some stuff you had ordered, since the bank wouldn't meet your draft. You been spending a lot of your money on your travels, looks to me. You better get back to work and raise some, quick.

"Guess that's a cable from the old girl tellin' you I gave her the slip out of New Orleans. Took its time coming, I'll say. She sure did keep right along after me. Come on—don't stop to read them. Gimme a drink of something better'n this—muddy river water, and some eats. I'm hungrier'n hell. Say—what's the matter?"

Perhaps, though he did not know it, Jonathan Barless had never needed his brother's aid as badly as now. But now, for once, that aid was not forthcoming.

David had toppled from the box in a dead faint.

III.

JONATHAN'S need, his own helplessness—this was the combination which tortured David's lucid moments during the rest of that night, the day that followed, and other nights and days which got jumbled in his fevered brain until he could never be sure as to what was delirium's hallucination and what really happened.

That his own hopes had been dashed from his hands as he all but gripped them, that he was ruined, that he had little chance to live to escape from the jungle trap Jonathan's arrival had sprung—these things could scarce affect him now. His life had been one brutal disciplining into acceptance of disappointments and defeats. In his quietest moments he cursed his own folly in having dreamed of escaping his life work of expiating his boyhood wrath.

The hope of love he gave up only a little harder than the others. He had but capped his foolishness in imagining he might marry a wife and possess a home and family. His duty now was to shut that thought forever from his mind; for his own sake he might only endeavor to banish Ruth Hardwick from a memory she must torture needlessly.

But here it seemed that heaven itself was not satisfied to let him off with the one punishment, but must double its keenest pains. No other hallucination persisted as the vision of her presence at his side, or made itself so poignantly real from the time he first thought he saw her. Even in periods of such clearness that he knew better than to try to talk to her, he still saw her and heard her talk to him.

Thus were all things tumbled about in his whirling brain. None of the others were so pleasant as this when he yielded it credence; few of them held any element to give joy; most were by way of mental torture worse than the physical pains of his sickness.

Some he could distinguish for certainly unreal, like the frequent presence of the woman he had loved. Next to that vision in constancy was his work with the Indian peons. He knew that, too, was nightmare stuff. He could not lift his head from the ground or his pillow without total loss of consciousness.

The ground or his pillow—few things got more completely muddled than his immediate location. The bare earth floor of the Indian hut—his skin burned with a thousand ant bites to back the belief that this was, or had been, his bed. But that he had lain in his hammock he could convince himself by regularly arranged bruises on his arms where the knots of the cording had pressed. And then, try as he would, his eyes refused to bring the open front of his shack to replace a certainly visionary interior of a tug's pilot house with a stolid Indian forever standing at a wheel. Even a wish that Jonathan were capable of getting the whole outfit headed downstream was bound to be the product of brain fever.

The certainly real things were hideously different. Jonathan, weeping for hunger in the hammock, wailing like a forlorn infant—that was the sort of thing that bore the inherent stamp of reality. Jonathan, raging at his inability to get what he wanted whence it had always come, brutally kicking the helpless sick man in an effort to rouse him from the floor and to action—David could but try to hope that was unreal.

And, most surely real of all, Jonathan just gone! And David learned from this how keenly we can love those toward whom our position must be most completely that of the giver of the heaviest sacrifices. No other thought tortured like that of the weak-minded brother, lost in a search for food, too mad to dream of such means as sane men use to find themselves, and growing more horribly mad with the stings of count-

less insects, the imagined terrors of jungle days, the real perils of jungle nights; lacking the sense to lie down and let death come as easily as might be, tearing his hands and bruising his feet to the pitiful end. The best that could be hoped for him was death's hastening by the poisoned dart of a savage's blowgun or serpent's fang, the quick crushing by a monster anaconda, drowning in the dark river.

Even Jonathan's mother had always wished death as the only hope of relief for his miseries. It was the best any one could wish him. David had shared the wish. It had not always been untinctured by the thought of the tremendous load that death might lift from his own shoulders.

But now David's hope that Jonathan was dead had been purified of any selfish thought. His own life had been thoroughly wrecked, and beyond salvage. He had neither hope or wish to live through the present illness. Really sick people are rarely loath to die. To David it came to matter only that he had certainly finished the heavy task his childhood fault had laid upon him.

And to this hope he brought an aid which would hardly have helped him in healthier condition. Normally, David was surely no spiritist. But now he helped himself believe that Jonathan's woes were over, by allowing some psychic reality to his persistently recurring visions of his brother. Certainly these were not visions of Jonathan as he could imagine Jonathan in the flesh.

These showed such a Jonathan as David might have wished to own as his brother. This Jonathan could give crisp, businesslike orders to the phantom steersman of the dream tug. He could step into the sick room on tiptoe, with some actual thought of another's comfort. He could stand up like a man. He could talk with the vision, Ruth Hardwick, as a gentleman should address a lady. And, once or twice, as he dreamed this new Jonathan's presence bending over him, it seemed as if his brother's ghost had fairly turned the tables upon him and become the efficient, competent keeper of a David as helpless and needy as he had been.

And this phantom, Jonathan, played a

part in one dream. He had found himself on the shore of an island, surrounded by hostile savages. He could actually identify that island still. It was not far above the mouth of the Javari. On his ascent of the river he had been warned of its temporary occupation by a dangerous tribe. In spite of the warning he had been forced to land there and spend the night. He had watched all through it. But the hostile savages had waited for this dream to materialize.

Beached just beyond the river's edge he had visioned the motor tug. Apparently it had been brought there in sinking condition. On board it three of the peons were pumping hard. And in its bow that Jonathan, who might have been, but never had been save in dreams, was working feverishly while he drove two other natives to assist him by shouts and signs.

David seemed to have sensed a glow of pride in this Jonathan who could work and manage and rule before the savages had rushed in, coming apparently from the woods in the island's middle, dividing to pass him and meet beyond, thus circling and cutting him off from the water's edge. They had come in stealthy silence. They were armed with stone-headed axes—hammers, rather, since there had been no attempt to sharpen the edges of the stones bound into the cleft ends of the handles.

David had summoned strength to leap to his feet. It had not lasted him an instant. His legs had collapsed under him. It seemed that had saved his life. Apparently the savages each believed he had been felled by some other's blow. In an instant half a dozen of them had picked him up and were headed with him for their place of hiding in the thicket.

In that instant he realized that he was not alone at their mercy. He thought that Ruth must have cried out. He glimpsed her, leaping ashore from a huge raft of logs.

Somewhere he caught the idea that, in every probability, they were bearing him to a fire which would burn him to death and likely enough roast him for a cannibal feast. But his terror centered upon the fate of the girl. He knew that his captors had divided, sending half their number rushing back beachward to seize her.

He was helpless in the hands that rudely bore him. He could not get another glimpse of Ruth. But he glimpsed something else which drove the thought of her completely from his uncertain brain.

Jonathan—the imbecile coward who had deserted him a thousand times in battles of fists and sticks and stones he had himself started by senseless, wayward acts of mischief, the weakling who would not go alone up a dark stair, who shrank from shadows in the moonlight, who wept in fright at a dog's bark, who bullied babies and the brother who would never again strike back, but ran, bawling, from boys of half his size who made a stand against him, whose final crime had been assault upon a bed-ridden old man supposed to have hidden hoards of money in a lonely hermitage where the criminal lunatic had gone by day for sheer dread of the dark of safer night—Jonathan had leaped from the tug's side, waist-deep in the water, and was plunging forward for the beach. He was armed only with a hatchet; he probably was not even aware of that, but carried it because it had been in his hand for the work he was at. Jonathan had called to the peons to follow him, and did not look back to see if his command was being obeyed.

No more did he pause as the savages faced about, and dropping David, rushed back to overcome and capture the stronger enemy. He met them at the water's edge.

If the next moments had not been the creation of delirium they must have made David delirious. He was not a man for blood; but abundant practice had given him a love for a fight against odds. It was a very revel for him to watch his brother.

For some seconds the whole mass of twisting, mud-smeared bodies seemed milling about in utter confusion. Above the heads the stone axes pounded, and the steel one. It seemed beyond hope that the lone white man could stand a full minute of it.

Then the mass moved back and backward up the beach. Some of it stayed, fallen, writhing, at the water's edge. Now and again another mud-smeared body dropped and remained. Once they all leaped inward and down—Jonathan had fallen. But he was up again—and pushing them back.

Back—back—until the hindmost stumbled over David's feet where they had left him. Two of them tripped and fell thus. It made room for four swift swings of the hatchet, and three more toppled over. And Jonathan made one quick stoop, and was up again, with David grasped by the waist under his left arm. And David had seen his face, an unsightly smear of blood from a dozen wounds. But out of it had shone eyes, clear and bright and brave and even tender, as they looked into those of his sick brother.

Then back again—his right arm wielding the ax, his head and shoulders bent to protect the helpless man he carried. The ranks of the savages had thinned now—but were not thin enough.

And then Ruth Hardwick had loomed once more on the scene. She must have rushed back to get the pistol she now pointed at the nearest of the brutal cannibals. David saw her pull the trigger. The hammer did not fall. Its spring was broken.

Half a dozen of the savages leaped toward her. Jonathan shifted his course aside after them. Harder, swifter, he swung the hatchet. It knocked the two who had first reached Ruth, right and left.

Then he hurled it at a third. His left arm snatched at the woman's waist. He staggered under the load, into the water, toward the tug. It left him unprotected against their blows.

But the girl did not need such aid. She freed herself from his clasp and plunged on ahead. David could only guess at the endurance which carried his brother to the tug's side. The timid peons seemed then to take enough heart to lend a hand. But the arm that had borne him relaxed as David rolled over the boat's side. A thousand stars shot through his hot brain as his head struck some projecting bit of timber in the bottom.

IV.

UNREAL—unreal—as much a figment of delirium as all he saw and knew for the phantasm stuff it was with a brain which was clear if his senses were not. He would have given another twenty years of hardship to make that scene real, to know that

poor Jonathan had just once been capable of such heroism. But it could not be.

No more than the strange room in which he found himself. Vaguely it suggested, now a room in a well-kept hospital, now the bedroom he and Jonathan had shared as children. And what he could see of the foot of his own bed and the white iron frame of another beside it, might bear out the last fancy as easily as another.

If his eyes would but clear as his brain had cleared—that white-jacketed, dark-skinned young doctor would probably melt into the unkempt figure of Taongi, his faithful but sadly inefficient cook. Poor Taongi—and all the rest of them—God knew if they could get themselves back down the river in safety, with no guiding intelligence to keep them in order and discipline. God knew whether they still had food to eat.

And the woman—Ruth—who would she be? It did not matter. Perhaps God was being kind to him to let him see some misshapen squaw in such guise. And Jonathan's voice beside him—that much might very well be real. They would have swung another hammock for Jonathan by now. But—oh, God! He had hoped Jonathan would not survive him. And he was quite sure that he was going to die.

But, no—Jonathan's words were too fantastic. It was but more delirium, hearkening back to twenty years ago, and twisting everything into absurdity—

"You don't think that crack has injured his brain any, doctor?" David could remember his father asking that about Jonathan.

"Eet ees pos-sibble—" That harrowing English certainly was not borrowed from the speech of any of Jonathan's doctors. "But *ze senhor* have suffer great fever. Eet ees to expect, that he ees queer in the haid for little time—no?"

Jonathan's words were amazing—

"For God's sake don't hint to him of the possibility!"

"Why not?" The doctor gasped.

"Man," I'll tell you why not," Jonathan fairly shouted. "I had a crack on the head twenty years ago. I escaped from an asylum for criminal insane to get down here. I was a lunatic."

"And all those—how you call—cracks on your haid in your fight with the Indians—have restore you. Eet ees pos—"

"No! I was restored two weeks before that. I was restored when I found I had to do something—had to do a lot—or starve to death on that hellish river. I soon saw that I could do it. I could hardly believe it. And I hate now to believe some things about it.

"Insane? It took me two years to make myself insane after that first blow. At the beginning I found that I could get away with anything by pleading a pain in the back of my head. By the end of the two years I had got to thinking I was privileged to raise the devil, that my evil impulses were beyond resistance, that I was insane. I let myself go. I went—to hell.

"Oh, doctor—turn him over a little, so I can see his face. I must know that he's all right—he's got to be. He's got to pull through. He's got to get all that lumber on down the river. He's got to see his big plans completed and be the big man I've kept him from being. He's got to marry Miss Hardwick, after she's chased me all the way down here for his sake, and straightened out the financial hash I made for him. He's got to forgive me and let me help him and pay him back. He's got to let me be his real brother—and show him I've learned how to be a man."

Could all this be real? Could any of it be real? Was this really the Mañaos Hospital? Was that a doctor? Was Ruth Hardwick really there?

But those things did not matter. No—not even the woman. There are other loves that can pale the love of man for woman into significance. David would marry Ruth some day, if he lived. He would be all a husband should be to his wife. He would love her with a big love.

But twenty years of his life had gone into the making of his love for his twin brother, twenty years of slavish, hard, unrepaid sacrifice. And now, far more than he wanted that life, he wanted to know if Jonathan's words were real, if Jonathan had actually come to sanity, if Jonathan had found his manhood at last, if Jonathan had come to be his real brother again.

Above all else in the universe, he wanted to know if Jonathan had been the hero of that island encounter. And—he turned himself. Ruth winced with the pain she knew it cost him; even the hospital doctor's lips drew in sympathetic strain. But David never felt it. He was in the throes of a tenser agony of hope's birth.

Perhaps some subtle psychologist could tell us why what he saw should have satis-

fied him. It brought from him a great sigh of an unutterable joy. His brother's head was completely wrapped in bandages, barely opened for his eyes and nose and lips.

"Jonathan," he whispered tremulously,

"David!" his twin brother sobbed back.

And both had said enough—had said it all. Yet Jonathan still deceived his brother. He did not tell that he, too, loved Ruth Hardwick. He never will.

The Lady in Blue

Part III

by *Augusta Groner*
and *Grace Colbron*



Authors of "The Man with the Black Cord," "Joe Muller, Detective," etc.

CHAPTER VIII (*continued*).

THE ROSE WITH TWO STEMS.

COMMISSIONER SENNFELD sat up, interested. Sensible officials did when Muller made such remarks. He waited for a moment or two, then, as the veteran detective did not speak, Sennfeld asked:

"Then you have grounds to believe it was not a suicide?"

Muller did not answer, but asked a question himself:

"Was there an autopsy?"

"Yes."

"But not a very thorough one?"

Sennfeld could not resist a laugh. "I admit it was a mere formality. Dr. Pan-

zer was able to determine the cause of death at once—internal hemorrhage from a stab wound. So there was really nothing else necessary."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Why?"

"I'm assuming that the body was not even undressed."

"No; it did not seem necessary."

"Excellent. Then the shoes and the gown are exactly as they were when Elise Lehman returned to her home that evening?"

"Not quite. The gown was pierced by the dagger."

"The bodice, yes. That doesn't interest me. The effect on the gown would be the same in either case—I mean in case of sui-

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cide or murder. What I want to see is her skirt and her shoes."

"Why, if I may ask?"

"I'll show you—in the Gray House. Can you meet me there to-day?"

"Any time after six."

"Good. I'll expect you there at six."

There was a knock at the door; a constable brought a dispatch.

"I hope that's the answer from Linz," said Muller. "I had them wire to ask some particulars concerning the dead woman's maid."

Sennfeld looked up in surprise.

"Why are you so interested in this Antonia Schreiner?" he asked, opening the message. "I could understand—if you'd seen her," he continued with a smile, "for in spite of her evident illness she was a deucedly pretty woman."

"Indeed?"

"Extremely pretty; better than that—extremely interesting."

"But you think she was ill? Why?"

"She looked so pale—really ill. It takes a pretty woman to look interesting when she's ill, doesn't it?"

"H-m! This young woman begins to interest me very decidedly."

"What did I tell you?"

"Not that way. I've never been—" Muller was about to add "much of a chaser," but decided to change it to "very inflammable! But this Antonia Schreiner, or whatever her name is—"

"Then you don't think that was her real name? She certainly has won your interest."

"More than that; she has confused me a bit—confused the detective in me, I mean, not the man," he added with a smile.

Sennfeld nodded.

"I understand. You begin to suspect her—although you first thought it was some man who was jealous of Baron Wallroth's claims."

"It may still be so," replied Muller. "Only I can't just see where this girl comes in."

"But you will see soon," said Sennfeld, looking at the old detective with genuine admiration.

Muller bowed. "Praise from the pro-

fession is indeed gratifying. But these things always come to light sooner or later."

"Especially if Joseph Muller helps," laughed Sennfeld, who was a good sort. "Now let's see what the Linz people have to say."

He read the dispatch, then handed it to Muller.

Muller read it and nodded. "No record of any such person. I thought so. Then she *has* something to do with the murder." He folded the wire and put it in his pocket. "Too bad that carpet had such an elaborate pattern!"

Sennfeld's eyes and mouth opened.

Muller went on calmly: "Because, if the pattern had been simpler or plainer—and if every one else had as good eyes as I have—"

Sennfeld's hand was on the detective's arm, and he asked quickly:

"What then?"

"Then this Antonia Schreiner, about whose real name and antecedents and position we know absolutely nothing, would have been kept under observation—and we would have been several steps nearer the solution of the mystery."

The commissioner's fresh-colored face took on a deeper red. He felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, more so than ever before in his official career. He realized it was his place to have discovered something of the truth of this case, but he had taken the simple obvious explanation for granted. And instead of suspecting this girl in the slightest, or even considering the possibility that suspicion might attach to her, he had treated her with sympathetic courtesy, and had taken a greater interest in her appearance than in her possible connection with the case. And he had left it to an outsider to discover that the girl lied in every detail that concerned herself. She would naturally have good reasons for doing so. Sennfeld realized that his conduct had been inexcusable in a police official.

"How could I have been so blind?" he said low and humbly.

Muller hastened to comfort him.

"Oh, no. You saw everything that several other people saw who were not at all

blind. Because you didn't see one tiny little detail—which was not easy to see—you had good and valid reasons for accepting the version of suicide. But I'll show it to you this afternoon—show you why I knew it was not suicide. And by the way, I knew that this morning, before this Tony got into the picture. It was the sitting-room carpet that told me the truth—and it will tell you, too, when you question it closely.

"But now please tell me everything you know about this girl. For I, also, paid too little attention to her and to what you have already told me about her."

Muller noted down what the commissioner told him. The latter had to hunt around in his memory a bit to supplement the bare statements on the police blotter with more personal details—especially such details as did not particularly concern the girl's looks.

Muller had his dinner served upstairs in his own room at the hotel. To the very correct waiter's surprise, he insisted on having his servant at the table with him. The shy Russian, with his furtive eyes, in which constant terror seemed to lurk, and his unspecified position of something between valet and secretary, was a mystery to the hotel force. They did not like him, and had already made up their minds that there was something suspicious about the lad.

Ossip paid no attention to their distrustful looks. His manner toward his master was one of doglike devotion; his manners, when he could forget his continual attitude of distrust, were those of a man of education.

"You're not eating," said Muller kindly, looking over at Ossip's pale face.

The young Russian blushed. "Do you remember, sir? It's just a year to-morrow—"

His voice trembled. Muller looked at him, then his face brightened into a smile of deep sympathy.

"Just a year—that you have been with me—a year to-morrow. I had nearly forgotten. And yet I had planned to tell you something when the year was up—something that may please you. I want to tell you that I have never for one instant re-

gretted the fact that I did go into Nicola Pludoff's barn that stormy night."

"Oh—Mr. Muller—master—"

His voice choked with emotion, Ossip left his place and knelt beside Muller, bending his face over the old detective's hand.

"There, there, boy—don't be so upset," Muller crooned softly, as if to a child, passing his hand over the boy's rough dark hair.

Muller's relations with Ossip Jewleff, and the boy's position in his house as his assistant, had a story back of them—a story very characteristic of the famous detective's good heart and unerring judgment of human nature. One of his man-hunts had taken him far afield into Siberia. Stopping a good day's drive from the railway to change horses at a little toll station, the stationmaster told him of a boy hiding out in his shed. The lad had fled from prison, drawn by his anxiety to see his mother again.

Nicola Pludoff had found him in the snow, so nearly dead that there seemed little hope for him. He had come several hundred miles on foot, suffering incredible hardships. The good people nursed him back to health, but had no means to help him on his journey. They trusted this kind-faced stranger and asked him to befriend the unfortunate lad.

Muller went to the shed and questioned the boy. Ossip acknowledged that he had committed a murder. In uncontrollable rage he struck down the man who insulted his mother and defiled her name. He had endured two years in a Siberian prison until word had come to him somehow that his mother was ill. Then he managed to escape and started out on a mad journey that nearly cost him his life. With tears in his eyes the lad begged the stranger to help him to get to his home. Could he but see his mother again he would return voluntarily to the prison to serve the remaining half year of his sentence.

Muller's heart was as kind as his judgment was sound. He took the boy with him as his valet. But Ossip reached home too late. His mother was dead. In his deep pity Muller kept him with him, and would not allow him to return to the horrors of

Kara. Joseph Muller had his own ideas about people who had been in prison. Under certain conditions he thought them the best sort of material from which to train up assistants for his own work. And this boy had been a college student, possessing a trained intelligent mind.

Life held no further interest for Ossip than the one feeling of devotion to the man who had trusted and befriended him. He proved an apt pupil, and Muller gave him as much work as possible, trying to bring the healing influence of an active interest into the mind darkened by sad and terrible memories.

Ossip cared little for other people; he found it hard to overcome the years of humiliation and the continuous whip of fear that had accompanied him on his mad flight through the Siberian wilderness. But for Muller's sake he tried to be more like the average, and did succeed sometimes. Muller told him it was valuable for his work.

"Men in our profession," the detective said now, "have to keep themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The less people notice and talk about us, the better for the success of our work. For the less they notice us, the easier can we observe and study them. So cheer up, Ossip, and eat your dinner. The waiter will wonder why two grown men can't make away with this simple meal. We don't want anybody wondering about us in this town just yet. You're young—that's cause enough to be cheerful."

Muller turned to his own plate with a light sigh. He had felt of late that the burden of years weighed on him more than he liked.

After dinner they sat down by the window to the enjoyment of a good cigar. While the waiter was in the room they talked of indifferent things—the interesting buildings of the fine old city, its famous mountain surroundings, quite like any ordinary tourists. But as soon as they were alone Muller told Ossip that he wanted him to go to the Gray House and hang about there, particularly on the side toward the river, most of the afternoon. He could take a book and sit by the river on

one of the numerous benches. He might see something or some one that would be worth noting. To test the boy, Muller's description of the house and its location was short and rather casual. They were to meet by the river about seven o'clock. "But, first of all, here is a telegram to dispatch; then come back for a letter I must write."

The telegram was addressed to Walter Thorn, and read as follows:

Your suspicion seems justified. Letter follows. Please wire me at once any information you may have that would aid in finding the lady's personal servant. Then send, by letter, all possible details concerning this person. The girl has spread a web of lies about herself and seems to have something to do with the case.

It was a lengthy message, but Muller believed in long telegrams where necessary. He had had experience with messages that were misunderstood because too condensed. An hour later Muller had finished a lengthy letter to the same address, which he turned over to Ossip to post.

The boy then set out for the Gray House.

Muller remained in his room for some little while, pacing up and down slowly. The old detective was irritated. He had struck a trail which his unerring instinct told him should be followed at once. And here he had to depend on others, or lose much valuable time in a difficult search for what any of several people could have found if they had kept their wits about them.

"Don't suppose I'll get much help from Thorn, either," he thought. "Deucedly pretty! Extremely interesting! Yes, they all fall for that, like flies for a honey pot. Our good commissioner seems to have paid far more attention to the girl's looks than to her words during his investigation. H-m! Fine investigation! He was a lot more interested in the living woman than in the dead one.

"Of course he had no time for consideration of the simple fact that a rose doesn't usually have two stems. It was left to old Muller to point that out, eh? We may be growing old, but we can still see a thing

or two. And *we* would not have let this deucedly pretty and extremely interesting Miss X throw sand in our eyes. Of course Professor Thorn— Well, he has a professional right to forget everything else over beauty wherever he finds it. He'd hardly be likely to notice anything about the girl that would give us a clew to find her. I'll have to play a lone hand on this hunt for her less beautiful qualities."

Muller grumbled to himself as he prepared to go out.

He went to the cemetery, famous for its location. But Muller was interested only in Elise Lehman's grave. He found a couple of men busy planting flowers on the newly raised mound. Stopping to talk to them, he learned that the dead lady's fiancé had ordered a splendid stone for the grave.

"It must 'a' been the gentleman who was here a day or two ago," said one of the men. "He cried real hard, as if he felt awful bad about her death."

"Probably the only person who did feel that way," suggested Muller.

The old workman shook his head.

"Oh, no, sir; there's a pretty young lady been here twice since the funeral. She cried, too. I saw her."

Muller was interested. "A young woman?"

"Yes, sir. Maybe you know who she was, if you know the dead lady's friends."

Muller wondered if his one idea was the right one.

"Was it a young woman in the twenties, pretty but sickly looking?"

"Yes, sir; that's she. She wasn't what you'd call sickly looking, not that way. I mean she was a well-built sort, but pale and looked as if she was awful sorry for the poor dead lady. She left this nice rose-bush to plant on the grave."

"H-m! When was she here last?" asked the detective thoughtfully.

"Day before yesterday—'twas dark already when she came in to go to the grave. She gave me three gulden for letting her in after the doors was closed."

"Oh, that's why you remembered so well?" said Muller with a smile, which was met by an answering one on the wrinkled face before him.

"Yes, sir. I don't often get such tips. And I ain't so old but what I can notice a nice-looking wench yet, sir."

"I see. Anything more you can tell me about her?"

"No, sir. Except that she told me she was goin' away on the train that evenin'."

"But she didn't say where she was going?"

"No, sir."

Muller dropped a coin into the man's hand, and went on his way. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he nearly fell over a wheelbarrow in the path. "She came to the grave several times—and cried there—and brought a rose bush—and gave a tip of three gulden. Rather generous for a servant—if she was a servant, which I doubt."

Muller walked on slowly, taking one of the fine promenades along the river bank until he came in sight of the Gray House. Ossip came to meet him, waving his hat.

"So you found the house, did you?" asked Muller.

"That was easy. I've done much harder things."

"Have you found any one or anything interesting?"

"There's a man, a young man, has passed the house several times. When I first saw him he was standing looking up at one of the windows through the gate on the river side. He seemed interested."

"Most people in the town are interested in this house just now."

"But this young man seemed particularly interested. I saw his eyes while he looked at the house—there was so much expression in them. Oh, there he is again!"

Muller, Ossip at his side, moved along slowly, keeping to the path by the river bank. A man was coming down this path from the opposite direction—a young man. He carried his hat in his hand, and the afternoon sun gilded his fair hair. "Goldie-Boy?" flashed through Muller's mind. For the man was deeply absorbed in thought, and his lips were moving as if he were talking to himself.

Just as they got near enough to see him well he stopped, took out pencil and paper

from a case he carried, and began to write eagerly. Muller gave a short laugh—a laugh at his own supposition. Goldie-Boy, whom he intended to look up when he had enough data to go by, was evidently a business man of some kind, probably a traveling salesman. Also, he could not have been very young, for his letters proved him an experienced lover. But this lad was youth and innocence itself, very evidently a college student. And at the present moment he seemed to be eagerly writing a poem of of his own composition. He was so absorbed that he did not see the men approaching. "Swan Song!" he exclaimed as he put what seemed to be a last flourish to the title. But just then he stumbled over a rock in the path, and the pencil flew out of his hand.

It recalled him to actuality. When he had recovered his property he found himself looking into the faces of two strange men, the elder of whom was frankly smiling at him in friendly sympathy. The youth blushed deeply, bowed and passed on.

"I think you'd better follow him, Ossip," whispered Muller. "I want to know who he is, I may need to question him later." The Russian nodded and strolled off down the path after the disappearing poet.

Muller had taken the gate key with him that morning and slipped into the garden unseen by Mrs. Deisler in her kitchen. The detective knew Buchner was not at home, for he had passed the gardener going toward the town some time back. He could roam about the garden and study the outside of the house at will.

There was a window open in Buchner's little cabin, up some distance from the ground. But Muller was still agile in spite of his sixty years, and he climbed in easily. He wanted to obtain some insight into the character and habits of this one man around the Gray House—the one man who had easy access to the house and grounds at any time. Buchner's somewhat gruff manner did not prepossess people in his favor. But the interior of his neat cabin, and the few papers and belongings in the room showed him to be orderly and thrifty.

Muller's short examination convinced him that he could put the gardener entirely out of his mind as far as any possible connection with the case was concerned. The detective climbed out of the window again and walked toward the house.

The gardener came in the gate just then, and Muller went to meet him with unusual friendliness, feeling that he owed the man an apology for his suspicions. As they stood chatting, Commissioner Sennfeld came up, and the two officials went upstairs.

The death room lay in bright sunshine, every line on the carpet clear and definite in spite of the intricacy of the pattern.

"I'm most curious to know what it is you're going to show me," said the commissioner.

Muller smiled without speaking, moved a few steps forward, and looked down at the floor. Sennfeld stepped up beside him, followed his glance and saw what he had not seen on that fateful morning.

The big Axminster carpet rug had a light ground on which was a pattern of entwining roses with long stems. Sennfeld knelt beside one of these sprays and bent down over it. Although he bent deep enough to have sent the blood to his face, his cheeks were noticeably pale. His eyes stared down at the carpet. And yet it was such a little thing he was staring at; nothing but a narrow red-brown line. It ran parallel to an almost similar line, differing from it only in that the one line was a graceful broken curve and this particular line was stiff and straight. The curved line was the stem of a deep yellow rose. And one end of the straight line touched the center of a rose petal.

"Then she *did* die by another's hand!" murmured the commissioner.

"Yes, she died by another's hand," said Muller, who had moved to the mantelpiece and taken up the dagger that lay there. He stooped and placed the dagger on the straight red-brown line. The line in the carpet was exactly the length of the stained portion of the steel blade.

While Sennfeld looked at the dagger, then at his companion, Muller stared off into vacancy, his lips moving softly. Fi-

nally he spoke: "I imagine it was something like this—" His voice was low and monotonous. "The man—I feel sure it was a man—strikes Elise Lehman down and then staggers back against the wall here, horrified at what he had done. He still holds the dagger tightly in his clenched fist. He stares down at the dead woman, as the realization of his cruel deed, the comprehension of its full import, presses into his heart and brain. Suddenly he notices the weapon in his hand, and shuddering, casts it from him—it fell to the floor—here."

"Yes, that is where it fell," repeated Sennfeld softly, as he rose to his feet.

"Where did they find it next morning?" asked Muller in more natural tone. "Can you show me the exact spot?"

Sennfeld led the way to the bedroom door, stood a moment in thought, then pointed to a spot on the edge of the rug. It was very nearly the exact spot indicated by both the housekeeper and the gardener.

"There's no mark of blood here," said Muller. "Which proves that the dagger was quite dry by the time the murderer placed it here to give the appearance of 'suicide.' He must have remained here with the body for some time. Blood does not dry easily, particularly not on a cold wet night, and we know it was cold and wet on the night of May 29. I can't understand, yet, why the murderer should stay here with his victim—the impulse is usually to flee, to get away from the horror—and the possible danger. I can see no reason for his lingering all that time."

"But if the house was closed," suggested Sennfeld.

Muller shook his head. "There are plenty of windows here, and most of them are surrounded by heavy old ivy. An active man could easily climb down into the garden. Besides, the key to the side door is in the lock, and the big conspicuous key of the river gate hangs near the door in the hall. You could hardly miss it. The gates are easy to climb. No, there are ways enough of easy escape from these rooms. I cannot understand why he should have stayed here until the blood dried on that dagger. If I could find out why—"

"I can see but one answer," said Sennfeld slowly, "and that is that the maid—"

"Is the murderer?"

"Yes."

"Did you find out what money or jewelry the dead woman had in her possession?"

"I went through the desk hastily. There was not much of anything valuable to be found."

"There are about three hundred crowns there now," said Muller.

"Yes," continued Sennfeld. "Baron Wallroth told me that he had given Miss Lehman six hundred crowns on May 1. As far as he knew she had no other money and very little jewelry."

"Then it doesn't look like a robbery. There might have been a quarrel, and a moment of mad rage. But that hardly seems possible when the two women came home together quite peaceably and—"

"And were together only a few minutes after that," cut in Sennfeld. "The housekeeper is witness that the girl was not near her mistress all night—why, what's the matter? What—what—"

Muller's head had gone sharply erect, his eyes were half closed. He held his breath as if listening to some far away sound. Sennfeld stared at him, equally breathless, until the tense moment passed, and Muller smiled his familiar smile again.

"She arranged her alibi neatly, didn't she?" he remarked lightly.

"Your 'deucedly pretty, extremely interesting' Miss Unknown looks to me like a very slick specimen. Good Lord!" Muller's voice had a sharp note of anger in it now. "To think you let her get away!"

Sennfeld's head drooped and he looked so unhappy that Muller felt sorry for his little outburst of temper.

"Don't worry," he said kindly, "that's happened to others before you. And you are all the more excusable in this case, as you are still young enough to feel the power of feminine charm. The woman must have something very attractive about her. Even the wrinkled old cemetery attendant admired her."

Muller told his companion of his visit

to the cemetery. Then he led him to the wardrobe closet and showed him the blue silk gown and the muddy shoes. "Do you think this charming Unknown would be so careless with her mistress's good clothes? Look, there's mud on the bottom of this skirt, too, at one spot, as if it had been dragged over a dirty carriage step. Would any trained maid put clothes away in such a condition? Or did Miss Lehman change her clothes before she was killed? Why should she have done this? There must be some significance in the fact that these articles—the silk gown, muddied, the muddy shoes and this long black cloak"—Muller opened that part of the wardrobe—"were thrust in hastily and carelessly while all the other garments hung in orderly rows. You laugh? Let me tell you, commissioner, it is just little things like this—trifles—seemingly of no importance, that have led me to some of my greatest triumphs."

"Is this why you want the body exhumed?" asked the commissioner.

"Yes, that is why. But now, if you don't mind, I'd like to be alone."

"You mean—I am to go?"

"If you don't mind."

"Not in the least," replied Sennfeld cheerfully. "For it's you who belong here, not I—we've both proved that conclusively. If you need me you'll find me in the Bellevue Café after eight o'clock." The commissioner held out his hand to the detective and walked slowly out of the room.

Muller scarcely noticed his going. He sat still, in deep thought, then he rose, looked around and remarked: "No, I am sure it was a man."

CHAPTER IX.

WHO CAME BACK?

"OH, it's you, Mr. Muller?" exclaimed Mrs. Deisler, as the pan in which she was scraping fell clattering from her hands.

She had not heard him come in, after his knock at her door was not answered.

"Did you think it was a ghost?" Muller asked, laughing.

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything in this house," grumbled the old woman, drying her hands as she turned to her visitor.

"What's that? Why is this house so different from any other house—ordinarily?"

"I don't know why, but it is. I've had my experiences here; I don't like it. And if they hadn't offered me more money for staying—"

"Why, yes, of course, I can understand, this last affair was unpleasant enough."

"There's been more than this affair; but do come in and sit down, sir; what's the use of staying in this drafty kitchen?" Mrs. Deisler led the way to her cozy room and pulled out a chair for the detective. Muller sat down and waited until the housekeeper had settled herself opposite him. Then he began again, in a tone of polite interest:

"You say there's been more things happening in this house?"

"There has, indeed." Mrs. Deisler was pleased to talk to such a sympathetic listener. "It takes some courage to stay here, I can tell you, sir. And hadn't they given me more money—as I said—I—"

"You wouldn't have stayed?" Muller smiled.

"You needn't smile, sir." Mrs. Deisler was a bit offended. "The likes of us has to endure a lot for a decent living. Still—I must say—there hasn't been anything much lately."

"How lately?"

"Oh, for the last week or so."

"But, before that? Did you hear anything unusual, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, ever so often. It would sound as if some one were creeping about in the house, and then again there'd be a rattling in the walls."

"It's an old house, and old houses are apt to talk to themselves," said Muller.

Mrs. Deisler leaned over toward him and asked, mysteriously: "Do they scream, too?"

Muller looked surprised. "What do you mean by that?"

"Because, there's something that screams in this house."

"H-m—often?" Muller could not re-

sist a faint smile at the old woman's superstitious fears.

She saw it, and turned away offended. Then his kind heart reasserted itself and he showed a flattering interest, and a desire to hear more that soon soothed her.

"No, sir, I didn't hear it but once—that queer scream that's never been explained. And, wasn't it queer, sir? It was the very night the—the poor lady died—as if it was something that knew what was goin' to happen—a sort of omen—and it was so queer, anyway. When Tony found her next morning and *she* screamed—that was different—then I knew who it was, and why. But that other scream—the evening before—why, sir, what's the matter—you look so queer."

The old woman stopped, startled, and stared at the little man who sat opposite her. His usually pale old face was flushed by waves of color, his nostrils quivered and his chest heaved with his quick panting breath. He paid no attention to her question, but leaned forward and laid his hand on her arm with a quick excited pressure. "When did you hear that scream? Think carefully, please. *Just when* did you hear it?" he asked. His gentle voice was almost harsh.

"But why—"

"Answer me, please; tell me just that and nothing else."

"But I told you—"

"Quicker, please, quicker—"

"Well, it must have been about seven, or maybe half past six—no, nearly seven."

"The evening before the body was found?"

"Yes."

"About seven?"

"Yes. I was all alone in the house."

"H-m—were you? Are you sure about that?"

"Why, sir—what—"

"Yes, yes, you're right. I must try to get at this thing calmly. I'll only confuse you otherwise. I want you to tell me all about it."

"But there's nothing more to tell, sir. That's all there was to it."

"Oh, no, my good woman, that's not all there was to it, not by a good deal! That

was only the beginning; but we'll come to the end *now*—yes, I am sure we'll find the end—the true end of this story!" There was a gleam in Muller's eyes and his nostrils still quivered slightly. Otherwise he was as calm as before.

Mrs. Deisler looked at him in growing alarm; but he nodded reassuringly.

"We'll talk this matter over quite calmly," he began. "I'll ask questions and you'll tell me just what you really know—not what you think or imagine, but what you know to be the truth."

"Yes, sir. I'll try to tell you nothing but the truth," replied the woman gravely. She did not understand what was happening, but she felt it was something of importance, and something that concerned the queer scream she had heard. Evidently this stranger believed she had heard it.

There was silence in the room for a moment. Muller was busy with his own thoughts.

"Why didn't you tell any one about this scream? Why didn't you tell the police?"

"Tony told me not to."

"Tony? Told you not to speak of it?"

"Yes, sir. She said the commissioner and the others would only laugh at me for a foolish old woman. She said I mustn't bother them about such things."

"You don't say? She thought of everything, this Tony, didn't she? Now tell me, did Tony hear the scream, too? Was she here with you when you heard it?"

"Why, no, sir. She'd gone out with her lady."

"Yes, that's so—the two—the *two* of them." Muller paused, then continued—"were at the theater. Then they'd both—the young lady and Tony—both gone out before you heard the scream? Surely gone out?"

"Yes, sir, that's exactly how it was. And I hadn't told you yet, I heard just one loud shrill scream."

"Just one?"

"Yes, sir; and the ladies had been gone at least half an hour or more!"

"And you're sure one of them was Miss Lehman?"

"Why, Mr. Muller! Didn't I open the gate for them myself? And wasn't it broad

daylight? I saw the young lady plainly, and heard her speak, too. I can't understand what you mean by these questions?"

Muller did not answer. "Queer—queer—" he murmured half to himself.

"Oh, I forgot. Tony came back once."

"Came back?"

"The young lady had forgotten her feather boa."

"Was that before you heard the scream?"

"Oh, yes, sir; they had been gone but a few minutes before she came back for the boa."

"Did you let her in?"

"No, she had her own keys. They always took the keys when they went to the theater."

"Did they go often?"

"Every two or three days. The young lady was bored most to death here. But she didn't want to go out alone at night, so she took Tony along, and let her sit with her, too, in the best seats. They always sat right down front."

"Tell me, are there two keys to the river gate?" asked Muller, who did not seem to notice the woman's last remarks.

"There were two keys once. But the people we had here last summer lost one."

"Where's the other one?"

"Back in the main hall, on a nail near the door."

"Good. Then Tony came back for the boa and then went out again. What happened after that?"

"Then, when it was nice and quiet in the house, I had my coffee and sat down to read the newspaper. I'd been reading some little time—and then I heard the scream. I was so scared I just sat still for ever so long. Then I got up and went all over the house. But everything looked all right and just the same as usual."

"Both house doors were locked?"

"Yes, sir—at least I think so. I know the front door was locked, for I had to open it when Buchner rang the bell at the gate."

"Were the room doors locked?"

"Yes. I know they were, because I tried them all. The door to the attic was locked, too."

"Where was Pollux? He seems to be a good watch dog."

"He'd gone out with Buchner. They didn't come home until after dark."

"Did you say anything to the gardener about that scream?"

"No, sir; he'd only have laughed at me."

Muller sat a moment in thought, then continued:

"And then—when the—*two*—came home?" He lingered on the word "two."

"The two ladies? They drove up in a cab about half past ten."

"Did you notice the number of the cab?"

"No."

"Did you know the driver, by any chance?"

"No."

"Now, listen—and answer carefully. Are you quite sure that it was Miss Lehman who came home with Tony? Did you see her plainly?"

Mrs. Deisler looked up, surprised. Then her face went white and her hands began to shake. "Steady, now—keep cool—don't be frightened."

"Then you think—" stammered the woman.

"I want to know what *you* think. Was it surely Miss Lehman who came back with Tony. Did you see her plainly?"

"No—I did not—"

"Why not?"

"It was dark down at the gate, in spite of the lights on the cab."

"But it was light enough in the house?"

"Yes—but—Tony had forgotten her opera glass in the cab and asked me to find it. Before I found it, and came up to the house, the lady was almost at the top of the stairs."

"And Tony? Was she in such a hurry to get out of your sight?"

"Oh, no. She waited for the glass, and then asked me if I'd make her a cup of tea, she'd come right down again."

"Did she?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice anything about her—anything different from the usual?"

"Only that she was pale, and looked

tired. But she'd had a headache all day. She was shivering, too, and real hoarse—and she asked me why I had the dog in the room with me?"

"Oh, the dog was in here—not out in the garden?"

"I had him in here the whole evening. I was frightened after what I'd heard."

"Yes, yes, go on."

"I told Tony what I'd heard and the stories about the house. She said her lady must have heard something of late, because she was frightened, too. And then Tony got scared and asked me if I'd sleep upstairs with her."

"And you did?"

"Yes, sir, I didn't mind having some one with me that night myself. We were talking it over when the young lady rang." Mrs. Deisler stopped talking and wriggled uneasily in her chair. "The young lady—or whoever it was," she continued with a shiver, "rang the bell and Tony went up."

"Did she stay long?"

"No, she came right back. She'd forgotten to put out the drinking water—for—for the lady—at least, that's what she said. She brought her own water bottle to fetch water for herself. Then we went up and Tony was asleep in less than half an hour."

"Think so?"

"But I heard her breathing, sir; the way one breathes in sleep."

"Or if one wants to pretend sleep?"

"Then you think—"

"I don't think—I'm quite sure that Tony didn't sleep fifteen minutes during that whole night."

"But why shouldn't she?"

"It's not easy to sleep when you know that—scarcely two doors away—there's a murdered woman lying—"

"*Murdered!*" Mrs. Deisler half rose from her chair—then sank back, shaking pitifully. "Murdered?" she repeated, dully.

"Yes, Mrs. Deisler, Elise Lehman did not kill herself. She was murdered, and your Tony had something to do with it—I don't just know what yet, but she was concerned in it somehow."

Mrs. Deisler still sat staring at him, trying to understand what she had just heard.

Then, as his last words penetrated her consciousness, she sprang to her feet and almost screamed:

"No, Mr. Muller—that isn't true—I'll never believe that. I'll never believe Tony had anything to do with it. She's innocent, you can take my word for it—you can't look that way—and act that way—the way she does and be concerned in a murder. Tony's so serious and so sad, and so gentle and she's so pious, too, and prays so hard. No, no—I don't know what you've found out—but Tony is innocent and that's gospel truth! Tony never did anything wrong!"

The woman stood looking down at him, her old face almost handsome in the fine flush of righteous indignation that suffused the faded cheeks. Muller smiled gently up at her.

"Are you sure it isn't just Tony's pretty face that has charmed you, as it did the others?" he asked.

The woman laughed—a short, hard laugh. "Nonsense," she replied angrily, "that girl's much better than just pretty. She's a good woman—you can trust me. One woman finds that out pretty quick—about another—we don't let ourselves be fooled by a pretty face, like the men folks."

There was another pause during which Muller made a mental note of the fact that every one who had spoken of this Tony thus far, had been prejudiced in her favor.

Then he continued his questions as to that night and next morning, asked about every detail of Tony's behavior, and had to acknowledge that she had acted as the most innocent person might act. Yet he knew she was not innocent in this affair.

Then he asked about Miss Lehman's actions the last days before her death, whether she had received letters or visitors, and whether it was known that she had friends in the town whom she met outside the house.

All he could learn was that she had received a letter some days before her death—a letter that must have contained bad or unpleasant news, for she had cried over it, and then torn it up.

"Where did this happen?" asked Muller.

Mrs. Deisler knew only that it was somewhere in the garden. She hadn't seen the occurrence, but Buchner had told her.

Then Muller rose. "Don't worry about what has happened here, Mrs. Deisler," he said in his usual kindly tone.

"But—murder—that's worse than the—other—we thought it was. Murder!"

"But it's all over now, as far as you are concerned. And at least you need have no further fear of ghosts. This house is not haunted. That cry you heard—it is easily explained. It was Elise Lehman's death cry."

He went out, leaving the old woman to look after him, shuddering, as he slowly mounted the stairs.

The corridors, with their ivy-shaded windows, were already dim in the gathering dusk as Muller passed through to the corner room. His first concern was to look about for some glass or other vessel in which Tony might have brought the water she said Miss Lehman had rung for. There was nothing there. But he must first find out whether any such vessel had been moved from the rooms since the discovery of the body. If it had not, then Tony had lied again. The ringing of the bell, which Mrs. Deisler had heard, proved to Muller that Elise Lehman's murderer was still in the house at eleven o'clock that evening. He had rung to notify his accomplice, Tony, that he needed her. He may have left the house then, and she had opened the door for him, locking it after he had gone. That need not have taken much time. The side door key was in the lock, and the garden gate only a few steps from the house. It could all have been done in three minutes. And the girl must have been absent from Mrs. Deisler's room longer than that. She had even had time enough to recover from any excitement those minutes might have brought.

But it was remarkable that knowing just what had happened upstairs, she could have sat there calmly drinking tea with the old woman.

Of course, the murder had been committed at seven o'clock. Tony had had nearly five hours to prepare for the ordeal. Still—

this mysterious, unknown woman must possess a strength of will quite extraordinary.

Joseph Muller, who knew human nature as few others did, found himself, whether he would or no, joining the ranks of this fair Enigma's admirers.

That any woman, any young, gentle, and attractive woman, could lie there and pretend to sleep quietly that whole long, hideous night—this meant unusual will power. And, indeed, this woman's whole behavior proved her to be out of the average in strength of character and steadfastness of purpose.

But she could not command obedience from her body. "I can well imagine that she looked pale and ill," thought Muller, remembering what had been said in this regard. "If ever I meet this Tony—I'm afraid I'll be liable to tell her how much I admire her—whatever else I may have to tell her," he thought as he opened the last door of the wardrobe and took out the black coat.

He laid it over the center table in the sitting room and lit the hanging lamp.

He examined the cloak carefully. There was no mud on it anywhere. But he realized that the spots on the dress might have come from a passing wagon at a time when the wearer of the coat had let it fly open in the wind. "A man, if it was a man, would have difficulty in managing a loose garment like this." Muller was already convinced that some one else had worn Elise Lehman's clothes on that late homecoming. He took up the cloak as if to return it to its place. Suddenly he stiffened, and dropped the garment on the table again. His mouth tightened to a straight line. He looked at one spot on the fine-textured, expensive cloth, then his hand moved slowly over it.

It was a spot which had been torn and mended—not carefully mended, but hastily, as if done by a trembling hand. The tear was not conspicuous, for it would have been quite hidden by the heavy lace that hung from the front of the collar when the cloak was in use. But it came in a peculiar position, on the left side, just breast high.

Under this spot Elise Lehman's heart had beat in life—and under this spot, Muller

was now convinced, this heart had ceased to beat forever.

"Yes, she wore this coat when she was killed," he murmured. "The dagger must have left some spots of blood here. Whoever mended this coat washed away that blood, for the cloth is dulled here and the light silk lining darkened."

The mending was more noticeable on the lining, and a few minute dark spots were still visible under the crisscrossed threads. Muller hung up the coat and turned to go, when his attention was again arrested, this time by something that winked at him like an angry red eye from under a little table between the windows.

He reached down and picked it up—it was the second hatpin, a big red crystal. The murderer's hand must have tossed it into that dark corner where the daylight did not reach it. It was the light from the table lamp that had struck it into fire.

"No—this was no premeditated murder," thought Muller. "This man was beside himself when he realized what he had done. He must have had a moment of sheer insanity as he threw these things about. But what came after was remarkably well planned—ah, yes—the instinct of self-preservation always triumphs at the last—but never quite perfectly—these two were clever, but not quite clever enough."

Mrs. Deisler assured Muller that nothing had been moved in the rooms upstairs except by the police. And she was sure no one had taken a glass from the rooms.

Buchner could not tell just where the lady had torn up her letter, but he thought it was somewhere near the fountain. Muller promised that he himself would come the next day, or some one who would bring credentials from him.

Ossip was waiting for him at the hotel, with the name and address of the young poet they had met by the river and with a telegram which had just come from Professor Thorn.

It read:

Can do nothing to help find person you mention. Think you are mistaken. Girl was taken on in Linz. Knows nothing of her mistress's past life. Has gone to Munich, now traveling with new employer. Looks sickly. Letter follows.

THORN.

"She told him the same lies and he believes them," thought Muller. "He probably thinks her 'interesting,' too. A strange woman! Everybody is for her and everything is against her."

CHAPTER X.

CONCERNING TONY.

MULLER instructed Ossip to be at the Gray House early next morning, to search the garden for bits of the torn letter. Then, after a light supper, he turned his own steps toward the City Theater. He asked the secretary whether the latter had by any chance noticed two young women who were frequent visitors at the theater during the month of May. They usually took front seats, and one of them was a strikingly handsome brunette, the sort of woman whom one does not easily overlook or forget.

"Oh, yes, indeed, I've noticed them," answered the man without a moment's hesitation. "Business has been pretty dull this month and it's easy enough to remember the few people who come regularly, particularly if they are in any way conspicuous. Why are you so interested in these two young ladies?" he asked with a smile as he pulled forward a chair for Muller.

"At my age, you mean?" replied the detective with a laugh. "Yes, they do interest me in spite of my gray hairs. But I may as well confess that my interest is entirely official and not personal."

"Official? That sounds queer—who are you—if I may ask?" The secretary looked at the card in his hand, "Joseph Muller?—sorry, but that doesn't say much to me."

"Which speaks well for your honesty. I like to meet people who don't know anything about me. And an everyday name like mine is a perfectly good alias whenever I want to use it as such. But this may explain matters." Muller handed the secretary his official credentials.

The man looked at the paper carefully, and handed it back with a more serious mien. "Is it one or both of the two women that interests you? I took them for actresses—is it the brunette?"

"No, the other."

"She was mighty good-looking, too."

"Indeed? So she charmed you as well as all the rest?"

"Then there are others? I'm not surprised. She was by far the more refined of the two. The other was too showy, too loud, if I might call it that."

"Loud is good. She's made noise enough in Salzburg since her death."

"Death? She's dead?"

"Her name was Elise Lehman."

"Oh—that was Elise Lehman? Too bad—such a handsome creature."

"But I want to know—who her companion is."

"Wouldn't mind knowing that myself!" laughed the secretary. "But I don't see just how I can help you there."

"You can help me to one thing—to find out whether Miss Lehman's companion was in this theater on the evening of May 29. I doubt it, still—"

"Oh, you needn't doubt it—"

"I mean I doubt whether she was here."

"Oh, I see. I thought you meant it was doubtful whether we can find it out. As it so happens, it will be an easy matter."

"That's good hearing. Go on, please."

"You see, we paper the house a lot these days. Our cashier has a son, a decent-looking young chap, who's fond of plays and who looks as if he might have bought an orchestra seat. He comes pretty often—see?"

"Yes." Muller laughed.

"Well, it so happens that this youth noticed the two ladies—he's not so interested in the show but what he can look about between the acts, and he's young enough to be caught by a pretty face. In fact, he's asked me if I couldn't seat him near the two—I've rigged him considerable about the Lady in Blue, as he calls her."

"Then you mean that he—"

"Wait until we find out whether he was in the house that night."

Fifteen minutes later Muller knew that only the companion of the Lady in Blue was in the theater on the evening of May 29. The seat beside her, which had been bought and paid for that morning, remained vacant. The young woman looked pale and

worried and stayed only until the close of the first act.

The links in the chain of evidence fitted perfectly.

In the Café Bellevue Muller found Commissioner Sennfeld deep in a game of cards. He sat down to wait, but Sennfeld, now thoroughly aroused to a sense of his own omissions and to a desire to make good on the Lehman case, could not keep his mind on the game. He made his excuses and left the table.

"Anything new?" he asked in an undertone as he reached up for his hat.

"Yes, and no," replied Muller. "Come out where we can talk."

They strolled along the embankment until they came to an empty bench.

"Well?" queried Sennfeld, a bit impatient.

"I've found out one thing," said Muller slowly. "This Tony is only an accomplice, an accessory after the fact."

"Oh!" Sennfeld gave a deep sigh of relief.

"Also, I know now that the murder, or the killing, took place before seven o'clock on the evening of May 29."

"But—the two came home after the theater, at ten thirty—"

"Two people came home—but not the two women who went out together. The killer came home with Tony."

"I don't understand—I can't follow you."

"Very well, I'll picture it for you, in proper order—at least, what I believe to have happened on that evening."

"Please, do."

"Elise Lehman and this Tony, who posed as her maid, left the house a little before six o'clock. Very shortly after that Tony returned alone, opened the gate and house door with her own keys. She told the housekeeper that she had come for her lady's feather boa. But in reality she came back to open the side garden gate and side house door for the Lehman girl and a man whom the women met shortly after they left the house. It was easy enough to do. Mrs. Deisler was in her own rooms, and the gardener had gone off, taking his dog with him. I imagine this unknown man to have

been a lover of the Lehman girl. I found letters which are very evidently from a successful lover who signs himself 'Goldie Boy,' and from whom the dead woman parted 'forever,' as she believed—on May 5 in Linz. This man does not seem to have been quite reconciled to the thought of losing her. The letter carrier brought Elise Lehman a letter a day or two before her death, which she did not open immediately, as usual. She took it to a quieter spot in the garden, read the letter, wept bitterly over it and tore it into bits. She thought herself alone, but the incident was seen by Buchner, the gardener. I intend to have the garden searched for those pieces tomorrow."

"You think that letter was from Goldie Boy? Hideously sentimental title, eh?"

"Yes, cheap sentiment. Throws a light on the mental caliber of the prospective Baroness Wallroth, doesn't it?"

"You think the man came himself that day?"

"I imagine it. I am sure only that some man came whom she wanted to receive with all secrecy. For, of course, Baron Wallroth must not know that he was there. Let us take for granted that it was Goldie Boy. That makes all the sections fit—with one exception."

"And that?"

"Is Tony," replied Muller thoughtfully. "I cannot understand why this woman—the sort of woman Tony seems to be from all I hear, should have aided and abetted the man and gone through with this elaborate apparatus of deception. There are several possible hypotheses, but we can go over those later."

"You think the girl was an eyewitness of the deed?"

Muller shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not sure of that. But I know she helped the man in every way."

"But why should he return to the house? And in Miss Lehman's clothes?"

"He had to do this to clear Tony of all suspicion—and also to put off the discovery as long as possible, which would help him in his own escape. And Tony had to arrange her alibi, had to be able to call the Deisler woman at witness that she could

not have murdered her mistress. As the facts stand, the only possible time she could have committed the deed was in the morning between five and seven. And the condition of the body when found proved that death had taken place many hours before. The physician who came with you examined the body at seven thirty. And, besides, the body was fully dressed. Miss Lehman had not been to bed at all that night. She could not have been killed that morning. And from the moment of her return after the last call from her mistress, until five next morning, Tony was under Mrs. Deisler's eyes."

"Couldn't it have been—"

"The moment she was upstairs, you mean? Hardly likely. She came down almost immediately, and looked no different from before. This Tony seems to be a woman of strong and determined will—but no human being has that much self-control."

"You're sure the killing took place during the early evening."

"Absolutely. The housekeeper heard the girl's death cry at seven o'clock or shortly before."

"What? She heard a cry? Then why the deuce didn't she tell me?"

"Because our mysterious friend Tony, who thought of everything, told the old woman that she would only make herself ridiculous if she bothered the police with such old wives' tales."

"Oh."

"You believe me now?" Sennfeld nodded. "When his victim was dead," continued Muller, "the murderer removed her hat, cloak and gloves. Or, rather"—Muller halted a minute and then went on—"I should not say *murderer*. I find no signs of premeditation, but every evidence that the man acted in a fit of uncontrollable rage, and then went through a moment of horror amounting to insanity after the deed. The girl must have goaded or taunted him—" He paused, looking off into distance as if trying to reconstruct some scene.

"Yes," said Sennfeld softly, not to disturb his companion's thoughts. "I can imagine it now myself. A cold-hearted, beau-

tiful woman has a thousand ways of striking a man to the heart, if he is foolish enough to love her."

"And this woman utilized men's passions to draw from them the money she needed for her extravagances."

Sennfeld looked up in a new interest.

"Was she that kind? I wondered!"

"She was not the woman whom Baron Wallroth should have married—but he, too, was dazzled by her beauty. He has had a fortunate escape."

"Then the—other man is excusable?"

"Yes, his rage may have been excusable. The fact that he took a weapon which he found in the room, and not something he had brought with him, speaks for an utter lack of premeditation. A revolver would have been different."

"Yes, yes—that is quite logical," said Sennfeld. "But why do you think Miss Lehman did not take off her outer garments herself?"

Muller shook his head. "No, she did not do it herself. She was killed while still wearing her cloak—I have proofs of that. And one glove at least was drawn hastily from her hand, drawn so roughly that it was badly torn, although quite new. It was probably done after the homecoming when the body had begun to stiffen. I have not found the other glove yet, but he must have pulled that one off as well. Gloves on a suicide do not look very plausible. He snatched off the hat, throwing one of the pins against the wall under a little table. I can imagine how it burned his hand. The other pin probably fell out of the hat of itself, and he laid it on the mantelpiece later.

"When he left the house the first time he took one of the dead girl's blue-silk gowns—she had made things easy for him by her fancy for that collar—her cloak and hat. He even, I believe, went so far in his care for the comedy to be played later that he took a pair of shoes—"

"Her shoes? But could a man wear them?"

"Elise Lehman seems to have been a tall, well-built woman."

"Yes, she was. I remember I noticed her height when they lifted the body."

"She had a large foot. But this man, although he may have been able to wear her shoes for a short time, strained them across the ball of the foot and walked heavily enough in them to bear the heels well down into a chance puddle."

"How did you—"

"Remember the shoes I showed you—in her bedroom—the muddied shoes?"

Sennfeld's murmur of assent was almost a groan. He was sunk in the depths of a humiliating realization of his own lack of qualifications for his official position.

"They did not expect to meet any one on their homeward journey," Muller continued when his companion did not answer. "But they had to be ready for emergencies. Women's skirts are some few inches up from the floor now, and the man's own shoes might have looked inappropriate under a light silk gown. They went to work carefully, those two. And I am inclined to think the idea of the masquerade was Tony's. It sounds more like a woman. But this is merely a surmise—I have no proof of that yet, only that there was a masquerade. I must find out whether any one was seen carrying a bundle in the neighborhood of the Gray House that evening. Or he may have taken a bag from the girl's closet, a valise or something like that. I can easily ascertain if that is true."

"Then they didn't either of them—the women—go to the theater that evening?"

"Oh, yes—Tony did. That girl is astoundingly intelligent. She realized that something might have happened at the theater, some incident that would make talk next day, and it might have looked queer if neither of the women knew of this. Of course, up to that point, Tony did not know what had happened. She merely wanted to cover the other girl's tracks, to make it appear they had both been there. But she must have been uneasy, for she looked 'ill,' and left after the first act. Then she must have met the man somewhere. I can't just yet see how or why, but she must have met him and learned what had happened. Then the comedy of the homecoming was arranged."

"Maybe she expected to meet Miss Leh-

man again, so that no one would know the latter had been with her lover—"

"Yes, yes—that is an idea—that may have been it. But the man came alone—and—yes—in that case the idea with the clothes was his alone. Queer. Anyway, they came home. He took off the clothes, but there had been a shower, and the blue-silk skirt was spattered and muddied in spots, the shoes were muddy. He stuffed them in the closet and left the cloak out to be cleaned and mended."

"Couldn't it have been mended some other time? I mean before that evening?"

"I doubt it. The dagger had pierced the cloak. And the killer would hardly want to have the body found in hat and cloak—or else—you can imagine he would have dreaded to touch her—that was human and natural. The cloak had to be mended and cleansed, so that the truth would not be known—at least as long as the guilty parties were within reach of the authorities."

"But the truth did come out," remarked Sennfeld with a blush, "although I had very little to do with it."

"You thought it suicide, as did the others," said Muller soothingly.

"What must we do now?"

"We must find this Goldie-Boy; and, most of all, we must find Tony. I have hunted all sorts of criminals in all sorts of places, but I confess this woman intrigues me as few of them have done. Back of these actual facts, which must have been more or less as I have pictured them, there is some story, some relationship between these three which will explain much—once we know it. And which—if we only knew it now—would help us measurably in finding the people we seek."

"The girl seemed very refined for a servant," said Sennfeld, seeking about in his memory. "But she was simply dressed and humble in demeanor."

"The secretary of the theater, who did not know anything about the women, except their appearance, said he imagined them to be actresses. We know Miss Lehman had been on the stage—and in the variety houses, too. But why should a fellow professional masquerade as her

'maid,' if Tony was an actress. Of course if she was—that would show why she played her part so well."

"Maybe she was in league with the Lehman girl—to help her see her former lover?"

"Yes—the fact that she helped in the secret meeting would speak for that. But what came later refutes the theory. And besides, commissioner, I have discovered, in the course of many years of work, that the actions of a man or a woman must be read in the light of character rather than of mere surface facts. When we have no direct evidence to tell us whether a certain person has or has not done a certain thing, we must fall back on what we know or can learn about this person's character and habit of life."

"That is the only safe guide. And that is why I regret more than I can say that I did not see and speak to this Tony myself. But from all I hear, from all sorts of people—tell me yourself, commissioner—do you think her the sort of woman who would help another in a low intrigue, to betray the trust of the man who was to have given Elise Lehman wealth and assured position for the rest of her life?"

Sennfeld hesitated, then spoke slowly and humbly. "I'm afraid my observations are of little value. I remember only that the girl was very pretty in a quiet, refined, dignified sort of way, and very modest and gentle, although intelligent and definite in her answers. More I cannot say without—trying to cover my own stupidity."

"Still that is of value, what you have just said. Now why should such a woman go to such lengths of danger for herself—later? Why should she stay on here? And why should she play into this man's hands as she did? Love is, of course, the usual explanation for a woman's sacrifices for a man."

"But if Tony loved this man, would she have arranged his meeting with a woman who had been his mistress, and then help him escape? A woman will do much for love—still she doesn't usually help the man she loves to a tête-à-tête with another woman whom *he* loves."

"No—not usually."

"There are other combinations—I must think them out. This Tony is going to give me a sleepless night or two, that I know. But I'll try and trace Goldie-Boy. And, by the way, there will be no need to exhume the body. I know now that Elise Lehman did not come home with Tony that evening. But if you can do so, I wish you would find the driver of the cab that brought them home. The man may have seen or suspected something. I would like to know where they picked him up."

Muller rose, and Sennfeld followed suit.

"Oh, yes, I forgot," said the commissioner as they turned toward the center of town again. "There's been a letter from Hubert Lohr, Elise Lehman's stepbrother. He had wired that he was coming soon. But he writes now to say that, as the burial is over, he will not be here after all. He makes no claims to whatever she may have left. He is a poor man, a teacher of music, and finds it impossible to take the time from his work. He doesn't mention the expense, but I fancy that's the chief objection. He says that he may come later in the summer, on his vacation, and visit her grave."

"Not what you'd call a loving brother, is he?" remarked Muller.

"No; but he was only her stepbrother. And at least he's not mercenary. But I don't suppose she had much to leave—nothing perhaps but just what is in the Gray House, her clothes and the bit of money, which really belongs to Baron Wallroth. Hardly enough to pay for what such a journey would cost a poor man."

"True. Good night," said Muller, giving the commissioner his hand. Then he turned and walked off quickly.

As Muller passed through the lobby of the hotel on his way to his room, after having stopped for a word with the attendant at the door, a young man rose from one of the big chairs as if to speak to him. But when Muller halted, expectant, the young man blushed, stammered something about a "mistake," and sat down again, raising his paper so that his embarrassed face could not be seen. Muller smiled, bowed slightly, and passed on. He had seen a strongly built blond young man, with

nothing to mark him from hundreds of other well-clad youths; still Muller, who never neglected anything, stopped at the desk and asked in an undertone:

"Who's that man?"

"He's registered as George Branschli, from Vienna," replied the clerk. "And he was asking for you this evening."

"Asking for me?"

"Well, I don't know. He asked if a Mr. Muller, from Vienna, was stopping here."

"Oh—he must have wanted some other Muller. That's why he was so embarrassed when he discovered his mistake. Good night."

CHAPTER XI.

THE TORN LETTERS.

MULLER had prophesied truly. Tony, the mysterious, did cost him a restless night. Hour after hour passed while the veteran detective turned over in his mind all the possible combinations of human relationship that could give him a clew to the motives of this girl's conduct. The facts he knew; that she had aided the secret meeting of Elise Lehman with the unknown man whom Muller supposed to be a discarded lover; and that she had then helped this man in the masquerade that threw the police off the track and gave color to the suicide theory. These facts could not be explained altogether by the supposition that the man was Elise Lehman's lover. If he were not, why should he have been goaded into killing her? Who else but a lover angry at her desertion could have had any cause for so fatal a rage?

The fact that Tony's conduct did not fit into the easy and natural supposition was just what aroused Muller's keenest ardor. Easy cases did not interest him, and this had seemed so easy at first. He fell asleep so late that it was long past his usual rising hour when he finally woke. Ossip's room was empty, and Muller knew he would find the lad in the Gray House. He did, but not exactly as he expected. Ossip was sitting on the chopping block in the locked woodshed, cheerfully smoking

a cigarette. Pollux was on guard outside, in an attitude of extremely watchful waiting, while Buchner was working near by.

"Does this young man belong to you?" asked the gardener as Muller came up. "I was takin' no chances, so I locked him up. He must ha' got into the garden by climbing the gate."

"Of course I did," remarked Ossip lightly. "How else could I get in? There wasn't any one awake at three o'clock."

"Mercy on us, were you here at three?" exclaimed Muller. "How did you get out of the hotel without attracting attention at that hour?"

"Down the waterpipe from my window."

"Two stories up?"

"Oh, sir, the walls of the Kara prison are higher than that. And it's well I came so early. For I hadn't but two hours to look for the papers before this chap got me by the collar."

"Which he had a perfect right to do," laughed Muller. "He didn't expect my messenger to come in that way."

"No, sir—you said yourself I was to hold up any one poking around here except on your orders," explained Buchner.

"Quite right—keep that up. Did you find anything?" Muller asked of his young assistant.

"This much." The Russian opened his pocketbook and laid a tiny handful of torn bits of paper in Muller's palm. "It took me the two hours to gather those."

Muller reassured Buchner as to his actions of the morning, and cautioned him anew to do the same by any one whom he found trespassing on the grounds of the Gray House. The experienced detective hoped for some assistance in this puzzling mystery from the well-known psychology of the criminal which drives him back to the scene of his crime.

Thus far it had been of little help to him. For the only person who had been seen lingering around the house was the innocent-looking young student whom Ossip followed recently at Muller's orders. He had ascertained that the lad's name was Franz Moser, and that he was a pupil at the Teachers' Seminary in the town.

Muller and his assistant went into the

house. The detective asked the house-keeper if she would give them some breakfast. Then he questioned her concerning Miss Lehman's luggage. Did she remember any small pieces the lady may have had?

"Oh, yes, sir. She had her big trunks and two hand pieces, a brown bag and a light-colored valise bound round with two black straps. I carried them upstairs myself, so I remember them well."

"What baggage did Tony have?"

"Just a valise and a roll, sir. She's taken them away with her. But that reminds me—there's something of hers still here. I did the laundry for the ladies, and two of Tony's handkerchiefs must have got among my own things in all the excitement. I found them after she'd gone, and washed and ironed them. You'd better take them."

Mrs. Deisler handed Muller two handkerchiefs, which the detective studied carefully. They were of plain but good white linen, with a neat embroidered monogram in one corner. The letters were A. K.

"A. K.? Antonia K.? That's one step forward," thought Muller.

Then he said aloud: "Did Tony always look so ill?"

"Oh, no, sir. She was a fine, healthy-looking young woman when she came here. It's only since those dreadful things happened that she looked so miserable. I'm sure I don't wonder at it."

"Nor I. Remember, I like my tea good and strong."

"Yes, sir. Oh—I nearly forgot. There was a gentleman here last night; wanted to get in and get up to the dead lady's rooms."

"You didn't let him in?"

"No, sir; but it was hard keeping him out. I thought I'd have to call Buchner once. He looked as if he was goin' to push me aside and go in. And he was a strong-looking young man, too. I was 'most afraid of him, he was so excited; although he was well dressed and not like a rough at all."

"What did you tell him?" asked Muller quickly.

"I told him you were in charge, and that he could see you at the hotel."

"You didn't tell him—anything more?"

"No, sir. The less them stories get about, the better for me."

"Quite so. What sort of a looking man was he?"

"Why, young and strong-looking and nicely dressed. He thought I'd take money to let him in, too. But then I got angry and shut the gate on him."

"Good. But if he comes while I am here you can let him up. And if he comes when I am not here—yes, let him go up, and lock him in the room. Then send Buchner for me at once in a cab."

"Oh, Mr. Muller, I'd be scared—"

"I may leave my young friend here—to protect you. Anyway, I want to see this man very much."

Muller's mind went back to the little incident at the hotel the previous evening, and he decided to make the acquaintance of this Mr. George Brantschli. If it were he who had tried to bribe and terrorize an old woman in his anxiety to get into the Gray House—and yet lacked courage to speak to a detective—the reasons for his being there might prove worth investigating. If it were Goldie-Boy—

"Please open the door, Ossip. The key is in my right coat pocket," said Muller when he realized they were standing in front of the corner room. He went straight to the table in the bay window.

"Antonia K.?" he murmured. "Her name probably is Antonia—Tony for short. It's too risky to take another given name; you're so apt to overhear it. But she was not Antonia Schreiner. You might look for the traveling bags in the bedroom closet, Ossip. I'll puzzle out these papers."

Ossip returned in a few minutes with one brown bag. Seeing that his master was already absorbed in his task of sorting the bits of torn paper, the young Russian stood motionless. His great dark eyes alone seemed alive. They swept the room carefully, taking in every detail. Once the boy shuddered, and turned his eyes away hastily. They had fallen on the blood-stained dagger, awakening terrible memories of the past that darkened his young years. To avoid the unpleasant sight Ossip looked down at the carpet. Then he looked again,

with a fixed stare of sudden interest. When Muller looked up from his papers his young assistant was crouching on the floor, carefully measuring the straight red-brown line that ended in the heart of a big yellow rose. The old detective looked at the boy with a happy smile. One of his greatest pleasures in life was to discover and then to train a mind akin to his own, a mind gifted with the power to see keenly and to reason on the things seen.

Ossip felt his master's eye on him, and rose to his feet, blushing deeply. "Of course you've seen this, sir?" he asked timidly.

"Yes. That first put me on the right trail," replied Muller. "What have you seen now?"

Ossip had made a quick movement toward the fireplace.

It was not a genuine open grate of the English type, but the usual Continental tiled stove. Only in this case the stove had been built in the form of a Renaissance mantel. The firebox had the usual entrance on the narrow side of the stove, but was open toward the room and protected by a handsome brass railing, so that the fire could be seen, as in a grate. Ossip stood staring at the stove for a minute or two.

Then he spoke, slow and timidly: "You have seen that, too, sir, of course? I mean—that there are papers in the stove?"

The boy blushed again as he saw a wave of deep color shoot up into the old detective's face.

But Joseph Muller was too big a man to lie.

"No, I did not see it," he admitted frankly. "I didn't even see the opening on the side of the stove. My eyes are getting old, like the rest of me, Ossip. I need youth beside me."

"Shall I—" began Ossip.

But Muller cut in quickly: "No. One thing at a time. We'll tackle that stove later. I must finish this now."

The returns from Muller's labor with the bits of paper were not great. He was disappointed in that he had expected or hoped to find the torn letter was from a man. But what bits of the writing was decipher-

able were clearly penned by a woman. The scent that still lingered about the paper was too strong to be called refined, and the writing was as inelegant as the style and the orthography. Here and there only could a full sentence be pieced together—otherwise it was only scattered words. "In Venice on . . ." "I couldn't love that pie-face . . ." "sure weak in the upper story . . ." "don't see why you have to . . ." "probably never see you again."

If this was the letter that had so upset Elise Lehman when she received it a day or so before her death, it must in some way concern Edmund Wallroth, and possibly also Goldie-Boy. Muller wondered

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

whether the writer was alluding to her friend's aristocratic betrothed, with the words "pie-face" and "weak in the upper story."

"I'm getting old," sighed Muller. "There may be some clew in this letter, but my brain does not leap to it as it once did."

"I found only one bag," said Ossip as Muller looked over at him. "There is no valise there."

"Then we have one thing to go by. We must find that valise, or some trace of a man who was seen carrying it. And a woman whose initials are A. K. Now for the stove."

The Weatherbys' Vacation

by

Garret
Smith



JACK WEATHERBY and Marie, his wife, sat on opposite sides of their cheery studio living room and studied each other appraisingly as though they were strangers at their first meeting instead of yoke mates seven years linked.

Indeed, few wedded couples had so much opportunity to study each other. For they were yoke mates in an unusual sense. They were fellow workers. Every working day for seven years they had sat face to face at the big double desk in the center of this very studio and collaborated on the stories and plays that made the joint lite-

rary name, M. and J. Weatherby, familiar to every household in the land.

And outside business hours they invariably played together. Jack's friends, men and women, were also Marie's friends, and *vice versa*. No one ever saw them apart. They had the same tastes, the same habits, the same mental attitudes toward everything in general. To all their friends the Weatherbys stood as the ideal of a perfectly harmonious married couple. And their friends were not far wrong.

And yet here they sat studying each other with the air of strangers newly met.

What Jack saw was a slender girlish figure, whose girlishness was emphasized by a tousled mass of reddish brown bobbed hair and a pink negligee. The ensemble, Jack thought, knocked off at least fourteen years from Marie's thirty-two. But her face itself was unwontedly serious. Her sensitive little mouth that usually expressed whimsical humor was set in a firm straight line. There was a troubled look in her keen brown eyes. From her soft wavy bangs to the top of her small straight nose a speculative scowl bisected her low white forehead. The long tapering fingers of the hand in which her firm chin was cupped drummed nervously against her cheekbone.

Marie, in her turn, was looking at the man in knickerbockers and smoking jacket, a figure a trifle larger and bonier than hers; features a shade more rugged and less regular, but same complexion and bearing. Strangers, in fact, usually took them for brother and sister. A little gray about his temples paid tribute to five years seniority over Marie.

Just now he was beset by the same nervous perplexity.

Marie was thinking, "When he speaks, I'll know just exactly what he'll say. He hasn't had a thought in seven years that wasn't mine, too. Hasn't he a single original idea in his head after all?"

Jack was thinking, "She's a dear little kid, but, confound it, why can't she spring something new? We're simply growing stale from intellectual inbreeding."

In short the Weatherbys had suddenly become conscious of a curious marital malady—disharmony arising out of too much harmony.

It had all begun when they were doing the preliminary work on their latest play, "The Rain God." Marie had devised a rough plot and laid it before Jack for revision. She had been greatly dissatisfied with it.

"Nothing very great about it, I admit," was his comment as he handed it back to her; "but it's just what I had in mind, and I don't see how I can improve it."

"Jack, you certainly disappoint me. I counted on you to think of some new twist that hadn't occurred to me."

"Can't do it, dear. Why should I? If you can't think of anything new, why should I? We got the idea together, and our minds, as usual, worked in the same channel. You haven't been able to give me any new slant on the cast of characters I've been trying to work out."

"We are certainly getting to be great helps to each other, Jack," she exclaimed petulantly. "What's the use of our duplicating effort by working together on stuff when neither has an idea in his head that the other hasn't already in mind? We might better work on separate things independently."

She flounced away from the desk and dropped on a divan by the wall.

Jack, hurt, astounded, sprang to his feet and stood over her.

"Why, Marie dear, what's the matter? Do you mean you want to give up our jolly working partnership?"

"I don't want to give up anything, Jack, but if things don't brace up somehow, we'll have to. It isn't merely our work that's growing stale. It's our play, our friendships—everything. Neither of us ever has anything to suggest that the other hasn't already thought of. I'd give anything in the world if you'd read a book some time that I didn't like so we could have a good stimulating argument; or take me somewhere you have been and I haven't; pick up some acquaintance I couldn't stand having around—anything to give variety and unexpectedness."

"Why, little Marie!" he demanded. "Don't you love me any more?"

She seized his hand in protest.

"Of course I do, Jack, dear. But the fact remains that we have stagnated. We are in danger of becoming bored with each other, and I'm afraid even love can't survive boredom very long. You see, we aren't held together by the ties that bind most married people. We haven't any children. We aren't dependent on each other in any way. Most wives depend on their husbands for support, and most husbands depend on their wives to run their homes. If we get to boring each other over our work and play, there won't be anything else, for those are the only things we have

in common. I wonder if it can be possible we have worn the bloom off our life together, Jack."

She looked so wistful over this startling line of speculation that Jack's first impulse was to drop on the divan beside her, take her in his arms and tell her to forget all such nonsense once for all.

But the stirring of a chain of recollection in the back of his brain told him this was not all nonsense. He suddenly saw Marie and himself and their life together from a fresh and detached angle. Instead of following his first impulse, he crossed the room, and after a moment of thoughtful unseeing, staring out of the window, sat down opposite his wife.

So there they were, studying each other. It was a long time before either spoke. At length Marie flushed a little, glanced down hesitantly for an instant, then, without looking directly at him, expressed as usual what was already forming in her husband's mind.

"Jack, I think if we are going to save things from wreck we've got to get away from each other for a little while."

Then she peered up timidly. He hesitated, and looked away in his turn before replying.

"I was just thinking, dear," he admitted finally, "that it might be a good thing for us to do what I've heard of other people doing, but never dreamed we could do—take our vacations apart this year. Each of us go where we'd meet entirely new people and be among new scenes, that the other had no share in. We'd have some fresh and varied experiences, and perhaps some ideas to give each other when we got back. We'd stop right at the outset the danger of getting on each other's nerves, and we'd have the entirely novel sensation of a reunion after an absence, and I believe we'd love each other all the better for it."

To decide to take such a radical step as this required long and frequent debates, sudden as had been the crisis that made it seem wise, and the impulse to suggest it. All of a week passed before they became finally committed to the scheme and had mapped out the details of the experiment.

A month was to be devoted to this semi-

detached state. Each was to pick out a spot neither had visited before, and one in which they had no acquaintances. They were to keep these destinations secret from each other to avoid any temptation not to carry the thing out to the letter. In order to avert the possible coincidence of both selecting the same spot, each picked from the map a State at a time by turns, tossing up a cent for first choice, which fell to Jack, until to each was assigned six States as his and her territory from which to select a vacation ground.

Then Jack set about preparing for his side of the adventure with a cheerful stoicism that Marie tried her best to emulate. But it grew harder as time for departure drew near. Always before when they were preparing for a vacation they had packed a common trunk. Each had thrown into it whatever came easiest to hand. It was hard to tell when the packing was done whether Marie had put in the majority of Jack's things or *vice versa*. Each knew what the other wanted. It was almost as though they had their wearing apparel in common.

For the first time Marie found herself worrying for fear Jack would forget something important he needed. A dozen times she inspected his trunk to make sure of its contents.

She surprised herself still further the last day or two before they separated by beginning to worry about his health. All sorts of things might happen to him while they were separated. If he should be taken sick and need her she would never forgive herself. She remembered now that he was forever starting out in the rain without his rubbers or an umbrella, and that she was always reminding him of that fact. He was careless, too, about his eating. She had never been conscious before that she had assumed any responsibility over Jack's personal habits. It had been purely automatic. Then how did she know what kind of people he'd be thrown in with? All his acquaintances up to date had passed her inspection. He was just a boy after all, she suddenly realized, in spite of being five years older than herself.

In short Marie was discovering what she

had never suspected before, the maternal instinct that every good wife feels toward her husband, particularly the wife who has no child on which to vent it.

Not till the day before they were to separate did she come to the conclusion finally that she could not stand the strain of being out of touch with Jack for a whole month. She would go through with the form of the separate vacation and let him think she was sticking literally to the agreement. But she must know where he was and how he was getting on.

Then there came, strictly as an afterthought, the feeling that she would be safer herself if she knew where she could send for Jack in case anything happened to her. Suppose she should be sick among strangers? Was she after all a little dependent on Jack? This was a new idea. She scoffed at it, but her mockery didn't seem very convincing to her newly aroused self.

That afternoon Marie slipped out of the house alone. Jack, as usual, offered to go with her. As a matter of fact he begrudged every moment she was out of his sight these last few days.

"No, no, Jackie," she denied him gayly. "I'm going to do some dull shopping that would bore you more than usual. We might as well practice being separated a little anyhow."

She went, direct as the taxicab flies, to a private detective agency she had located in the classified telephone directory.

And thus it came about that when the Weatherby partnership was temporarily dissolved, and the male partner, having been assigned by the toss of a coin to depart first, set forth on the dreaded vacation, an unobtrusive person who happened to be passing the apartment house at the moment, slipped into a suspiciously handy taxi and trailed Jack to the New Haven Railroad Station. From there the stranger followed him to Whaleport, a little fishing town on the Massachusetts coast near Cape Cod.

The next day, Marie, now established in a Connecticut farmhouse on the Sound just across the State line, received a letter from the unobtrusive person giving the whereabouts of her husband. And the following

day the U. P. got from her a check for his services and the information that his job was done.

This rather puzzled and disappointed him, for he had scented an incipient divorce case, and quite a number of those checks in the course of it. He kicked himself a little for finding "the husband guy" so easily. Then he turned to other matters.

Marie was not in the least surprised to find Jack located in Massachusetts for the month. She had set her heart on that State herself, and had been greatly disappointed when Jack won the toss and nabbed it first. So she had taken Connecticut as the next best. All of which was typical Weatherby harmony.

Knowing Jack's whereabouts, Marie settled down in the quaint little Connecticut hamlet with much more peace of mind than she expected. There was a wealth of curious characters about her, and she told herself she was going to have a pleasant and profitable time studying them all by herself.

But from the outset she was vaguely disappointed. She wanted immediately to share each new human specimen with Jack. To be sure, she knew just what he would say about them all; but then it was pleasant to hear him say it; pleasant to have him confirm her own opinions. And how he would delight in her finds; their finds they would be, as they always had been before!

In short she was lonesome.

What kind of a time was Jack having anyhow? Was he finding some interesting people? Or was he getting in with a fast crowd that would do him no good? Jack had been a little bit over lively, she suspected, in the days before their marriage. He was always looking up impossible persons with no morals and less manners, and excusing himself on the ground that he was getting literary material.

There was that Holloway woman, for instance. Marie shuddered. What kind of women were there hanging around Whaleport, she wondered. Of course she could trust Jack anywhere. She knew that. But he was such a guileless fellow. His name

was too well known to run the slightest risk of scandal.

And the next day it rained—a cold summer drizzle from the sea. Just the kind of a rain that gave people colds! Had Jack remembered to put in a sweater and some middle-weight underwear? If he had, would he remember to put them on? She came near starting for Whaleport in the rain, but restrained herself after a struggle.

The following morning she read a short front-page story in the *Herald* about a shark sighted off Cape Cod. That settled it. Jack was an enthusiastic swimmer and foolhardy about it. He had never seemed foolhardy in the old days when they swam together. Marie was an enthusiastic swimmer, too. But now it seemed different. Marie didn't stop to analyze the difference. She just felt it. Would Jack know enough to stay out of a shark-infested sea? Maybe he wouldn't even see the story about the shark, or he'd think it a fake if he did. Jack never did believe what he read in the papers. Marie never had before.

At any rate her lingering qualms about keeping the vacation agreement thinned out and evaporated. She was off for Whaleport by the next train. For the occasion she wore a dress and hat she had bought the day she slipped away alone to see the detective and had incidentally done the shopping she had used as an excuse. She had taken care that Jack should not see the outfit, having in mind some such possible contingency as this. Her face was concealed by a heavy veil.

For Marie had no intention of revealing herself to her husband. She simply wanted to see him at a distance and know he was all right. That is, unless he went in swimming. Then she would certainly interfere.

With throbbing heart Marie went to the hotel where her agent had reported Jack as a guest. This was a real adventure. She took a room under the name of "Miss Margaret Whiting of New York." This name was selected at random. Persons taking assumed names often instinctively retain their own initials.

As she registered she casually glanced back over the list of names. Yes, Jack was there. The verification of the detective's

report in no way surprised her, but it sent her into a panic. What if Jack should step up to the desk at this moment? Would he recognize her? What would she say if he did? For the first time in her married life she found herself dreading Jack's displeasure. She had never had to think about it before.

Now that she was here, what was she going to do about it? She felt foolish and awkward. But she had come to catch sight of Jack. Here was the most likely place to see him. There was nothing to do about it but to wait till he appeared, as she could manifestly make no inquiries without attracting his notice.

So she strolled about the little lobby till she was satisfied that he was not around there, and then selected a seat where she could watch every one who came and went. And in doing so she realized that she was receiving uncomfortable attention. A veiled woman at a summer hotel is not a usual sight. Her fellow loungers eyed her a little curiously, and she felt much more conspicuous than she really was.

But an hour of waiting revealed no sign of Jack. She went out and took a turn up and down the veranda with no better result. It had been near luncheon time when she arrived, and she had counted on his being around the hotel then.

Her eyes fell on the shore, where a few late forenoon bathers still sat about in the sand. There were several taking a final plunge before dressing for luncheon. Panic seized her again. Suppose he were in swimming as were these other foolhardy ones! As she hurried down to the beach she saw in fancy triangular shark fins cutting the crest of every wave.

But Jack was not in bathing. She watched till the last bather had retired to the bath house. Then she returned to the hotel and ventured into the dining room. Taking an out of the way table where she could observe those entering, she spent nearly two hours over her luncheon. But in all that time there was no sign of Jack.

She grew vaguely uneasy. Utterly foolish, she told herself. He might be doing some writing in his room and have forgotten the time. He was up to such tricks.

Or perhaps he was eating somewhere else. He might have gone off for a day's sailing or fishing or for a tramp along the beach.

She spent a long drawn out and dreary afternoon watching in vain, pacing the beach in a fearsome study of the bathers, strolling up and down the hotel veranda or sitting in a corner of the lobby. Jack did not appear at dinner. When she gave up at eleven o'clock and went to bed she still assured herself that there was no real cause for alarm. But all that night she was troubled by dreams of Jack in trouble. She saw him being bitten in two by a shark, drowning in a capsized sail boat, shanghaied by rough sailor men. But the dream that troubled her most was one of his lying sick and alone in his room, too weak to summon help.

When he failed to appear at breakfast the next morning, this last dream began to haunt her. She wondered if he might not have caught cold the day of the rain and be confined to his bed now with no one but strangers to look after him. This fear became an obsession with her by ten o'clock. In spite of the possibility of complications she finally approached the desk clerk.

"I'm Miss Whiting," she reminded him. "I hear that Mr. John Weatherby, the writer, is registered here. Is that true?"

"Yes," the clerk admitted. "Mr. Weatherby has a room here."

"I'm a friend of his. He doesn't know I am here. Please don't mention my inquiry. I wish to surprise him. I've been here a day and haven't seen him. Is he about the place much? Or does he keep to his room?"

The clerk pricked up his ears. Here was further mystery added to the already mysterious veiled woman. He had already heard one guest, supposedly "in the know," remark on seeing Weatherby's name on the register that he was surprised to find Weatherby registered anywhere without his wife. The joint authors, so this informed person had added, were famous for never being separated.

And now here was another woman inquiring for him confidentially, and a woman who partially hid her features under a

veil. The clerk inferred from the vague glimpse he got through the latter that the features could well bear complete exposure.

"Well," he replied judicially to Marie's last inquiry, "Mr. Weatherby is a very busy man, I take it. He wasn't around much while he was here. He still has his room here for the month, but he went away yesterday morning for a few days' business trip. Probably be back in a week. Would you like to leave a message for him?"

"No, thanks," Marie managed to stammer. "I'll be here for some time. Please don't mention my inquiry."

She turned away bewildered. What possible business excuse could have called him away from a vacation? All their business was in common, and she knew nothing of importance was in sight when she left home. Possibly something unexpected had come up in connection with one of their books, and a letter had been forwarded to him instead of to her. Both of them had left forwarding addresses at the post office.

She called up her Connecticut boarding house on the long distance telephone and asked if any mail had come to her since she left. There was none. Then she called in turn their publishers and several theatrical managers with whom they had dealings. She could learn nothing of any unexpected business.

Well, she could do nothing but sit around and await his return. This she proceeded to do, getting more and more uneasy as the days passed and there was no sign of him. Whatever the business was, it concerned them both, of course, and quite likely he needed her counsel. He had done no business in seven years without advising with her, and she didn't see very well how he could do it now. Pretty mess they had made of things, running off and hiding from each other like this!

Meantime the hotel clerk, bursting with his mystery, had babbled, and presently the casual notice of her fellow guests which had annoyed and embarrassed her developed into pointed attention that became almost unbearable. Marie began to observe covert glances and whispered comments following her wherever she went. Little knots of heads humming with low-

toned gossip would suddenly draw apart into embarrassed silence as she approached. She shrank more and more away from the others and kept as much as possible out of sight. But she could not abandon her vigil. Her helpless misery increased hourly.

One day she was seated alone around an angle of the veranda when a group of dowagers settled in rockers just out of her range of vision. But their hard, cracked voices came to her distinctly.

"No doubt of it. She's a female detective," one declared, evidently continuing a conversation they had been carrying on as they approached.

"I don't believe it for a minute," demurred another emphatically. "She isn't the type. To be sure I've had no clear view of her face behind that absurd veil, but she strikes me as at least a good imitation of a lady, and of the kind an author would be likely to have an affair with. It's evident he's separated from his wife. Probably this woman's the cause. He's grown tired of her and is dodging while she pursues."

"In my opinion either of you may be right about the woman of the veil," declared another strident voice, "but you've both overlooked the real reason why he left. Do any of you happen to recall the departure of any female person of somewhat questionable character about the time Weatherby disappeared?"

"The Galbert widow!" exclaimed the two others almost simultaneously after a moment of thoughtful silence. "The day before he did," one added.

"I heard her say she was leaving unexpectedly," contributed the other.

Marie sprang to her feet and escaped unnoticed. She fled to her room, where she could think it out.

Could it be possible Jack was having a vulgar affair with this widow as that hateful old gossip implied? All Marie's instincts protested against any suspicion of Jack's unfaithfulness. That simply couldn't be. But at the least her naïve other half laid himself open to scandalous gossip and she must defend him. It was quite possible that he had been interested

in this woman as a character, and had followed her that he might study her more closely without being subject to the gossip of these people who knew who he was. That was the way he always explained the Holloway person. She had been a designing piece of baggage. So, no doubt, was this widow.

But even had she known Jack was mixed up in a scandalous affair, Marie would have blamed the woman utterly and rushed to the aid of her dear one. That was the mother of it.

As she struggled for a solution she recalled the suggestion of the first dowager on the porch that she, Marie, was a detective. That brought back to mind the unobtrusive person who had learned Jack's destination for her. Why hadn't she thought of him before?

She rushed to a telegraph office and sent a brief wire to New York. Two hours later the U. P. read the message and smiled sardonically.

"Just like I thought in the first place," he grunted. "Well, if the little lady wants a muffler put on the wedding-bells, I'm the boy to do it."

But the detective, after a week's work and daily reports to Marie at carefully clandestine meetings, achieved nothing excepting the further complication of the already sadly tangled plot. It was now the beginning of the fourth and last week of the Weatherbys' semi-detached vacation that had become so completely detached. Every means that could be employed to find the missing man had been used, short of open publicity, which Marie determined to avoid as long as possible.

Correspondents of the detective bureau in every city were secretly watching for him. The Weatherby apartment in New York was kept under surveillance lest Jack slip back there. Newspapers were scoured for hints. All in vain. And Marie had spent a lot of money in the hunt.

Then, at the beginning of the last week, the story somehow got to the press. Marie was besieged by the reporters. Her first impulse was to refuse to see them and flee from the place. But second thought forbade it. She must stay and watch for Jack

and she must use her wits and keep the story out of the news until it became certain that Jack was really lost.

She met the interviewers in a group, more heavily veiled than ever, and trembling for fear that some one of those keen-eyed young men might recognize her. She gave them no chance to cross-examine her. She had a statement carefully composed and committed so that there could be no chance contradiction.

"You gentlemen are following a false scent," she told them solemnly. "Mr. and Mrs. Weatherby are enjoying their vacation quietly where they won't be disturbed by undesired publicity. To insure this they have kept the place secret, and are using assumed names. Mr. Weatherby came here first, and his wife was to join him here, but they suddenly changed their plans, realizing that they could not rest properly here where their identity was known. I am a friend of both of them, and expected to see them here, but shortly after my arrival Mrs. Weatherby informed me of their change in plans. As for a detective being on Mr. Weatherby's trail, that is most absurd. You will probably find that is a joke of some of their friends. I can speak for them in saying that your papers had better be careful not to print anything that will even hint at anything of a scandalous nature as it would be absolutely untrue and extremely libelous."

And this statement was substantially repeated in the news the next morning. The city editors decided there was nothing more to it and dropped the matter.

But Marie, though relieved at thus averting an open scandal, grew steadily more unhappy and worried as the final week wore away without the slightest hint of her husband's whereabouts.

At length came the last day of their month. Jack's room was still held in his name. His clothing was still there, as the detective learned.

They had agreed on parting to meet in their apartment the following morning for the first reunion of their lives. Marie hated to leave Whaleport without solving the mystery, but decided finally to keep the tryst. If Jack failed to appear then,

something terrible had certainly happened to him.

So with a heart of lead, and filled with forebodings, she returned home, stopping on the way to collect her own baggage and pay her bill at her unused Connecticut boarding house.

Never in her life had she dreaded anything so much as entering the apartment again, with the possibility of finding it empty.

And it was empty. Marie searched it from end to end, half expecting to find Jack hiding somewhere, then threw herself down on the divan in the studio and wept convulsively. She felt sure now that Jack was dead, or had deserted her. And to think she had ever found him dull! What wouldn't she give now to hear one of his expected and tiresome remarks? What fools they had been to tamper with their love! Had he believed she no longer loved him and taken this method of removing himself out of her life? Or, worse thought yet, perhaps he didn't love her any more and had simply disappeared!

Well, she had bored him, of course. She had been just as dull as he was. But she had learned one thing when it was perhaps too late. They did depend on each other after all, just as much as though he had been her provider and she his housekeeper in the old-fashioned way they had sneered at so often. If he would only come back and let her mother him—and, yes, he could father her a little, too—he might never in his life have an original thought or do or say an unexpected thing.

Then she laughed hysterically. Jack had done an original thing at last—something unexpected and different. But what?

Then, just as she reached this peroration a key clicked in the lock and the next instant Jack stood before her.

"Jack!" she exclaimed, throwing herself in his arms and snuffling into his coat collar. "Where have you been? I thought you had deserted me."

Then, with Jack back home safe, she had, after a long moment of tears, a revolution of feeling and became indignant. She pushed him away from her and looked at him accusingly.

"Yes, I'd like to know where you have been. You have given me a nice vacation I must say!" she declared coldly.

Jack had recovered from his emotional outburst as quickly. He came as near to glaring at her as he ever had in his life.

"Where have I been?" he exclaimed. "The question is where have you been? When it comes to giving any one vacations you are a prize-winner. Listen, I'll tell you where I've been. Just before we separated a month ago I got to brooding over what might happen to you all alone in a strange community, in case you were ill. I realized for the first time that you were just a girl after all and needed me. So I got a de-


tective to trail you and let me know where you were, so that I could protect you from a distance at least in case anything happened. And, besides, I might need you, too, for something. I never realized before, you see, how much we depended on each other. Then the third day I couldn't stand the strain any longer. I simply had to be on the spot. I went to the boarding house where you had a room, but found you were away temporarily. So I settled down there, and if you must know, I've spent my whole vacation just watching for you."

"Original man!" exclaimed Marie, and then she clasped her boy to her bosom, and for a long time neither spoke.

South of Fifty- Three

Part V

by Jack Bechdolt



Author of "The One Way Street," etc.

CHAPTER XVI (*Continued*).

KALVIK ISLAND JUSTICE.

THE promoter hesitated and Hayes pulled him from the chair and away from the table where he faced him. "Put up your fists," he said, hoarsely. "Defend yourself."

Fox found his voice. "For God's sake—somebody! Are you all going to stand and see murder done?"

Hayes jerked a glance at his audience. "Remember," he warned, "anybody who interferes will get hurt. Now, Fox!"

Fox backed slowly toward the table. He made no attempt to raise his fists. In a moment he was pressed tightly against the table edge. Although there was several feet between him and Hayes he acted as if the man's nearness was enough to flatten his body against that furniture.

"Defend yourself!" Hayes growled.

Fox suddenly pulled open a drawer of the table. His hand sought and found a pistol, and almost instantly discharged it at Hayes. The noise was deafening.

Fox's aim was poor.

The report was followed by the scuffling

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for March 25.

of the two men, a scream from Fox and the crash of a plate glass window breaking as Hayes hurled the pistol through it. The blow of Hayes's fist started Fox spinning, and a second blow halted him almost as quickly.

Fox, driven to it, hurled himself at the Alaskan and landed a smashing blow of his own. A moment they were intertwined, clinching, and then the sharp *smack-smack* of fists on flesh that sent Fox half way across the big room where he collapsed like a sack.

Hayes followed him up and examined him grimly.

"The man is not dead," he announced. "I was careful of that. Probably he is not even permanently disfigured, but I pray God I have put a scar on his soul that will make him loathe himself until the day he dies."

Hayes went to the outer door of the office and unlocked it. He threw it open, pressed through the group of terrified office assistants and disappeared.

Marion was first to break the silence that held them. "Splendid!" she cried, "he's splendid! Every word he said was the truth. Everything he did was right! I love him for it!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"YOU CAN'T QUIT NOW!"

MARION hunted for three days before she found Jonathan Hayes. He disappeared completely when he walked out of Douglas Fox's office and left Fox bruised and scarred to wake to consciousness that only made him wish he could forget.

The hotel knew nothing of Hayes's plans. He was gone, and the only souvenir of him was the remnant of the store of spectacular souvenirs Douglas Fox had bought for distribution by the "Eskimo Prince." There was no value in the lot of it.

In her search for Hayes Marion encountered Al Sapley and asked his help.

"Don't know where he is," Sapley said briefly. "Don't want to know. All I got to say is don't let me know when you find

him. If I see him there's going to be a shooting."

She saw that Sapley was in earnest and wondered. "Al, you saw the papers? You heard what Hayes did?"

"Not being deaf, dumb or blind, I did! You can't hear anything else around this town—"

"But isn't he splendid? Oh, Al! Isn't he splendid!"

Al stared at her with bitter scorn. "So you're falling for this rough stuff, are you? Splendid! That's your idea of splendid, is it? A big roughneck beating somebody up—walking over men because he packs a bigger punch than they do. Splendid? Hell!"

"But he did right. He did absolutely the one thing he could do. He gave Fox exactly what was coming to him, and in the most effective way. You've got to admire that—"

"Fox! Oh, I don't give a damn about Fox. But for what he did to me—"

Marion said dryly: "You had it coming to you, too!"

"I didn't have it coming to me that anybody should rub my face in the dirt! Apologize? Yes. But treat me like I was some kind of poodle, make me grovel? I want to tell you right now, no man's going to do that and get away with it if he leaves me alive. Get that!"

There was a venom in Al's bitterness that made Marion wonder. She knew that Al Sapley was a bad man to cross.

Al laughed his way through most of life, his being a sophisticated sort of laughter. In a gathering he was usually the willing clown. If you were his friend he cheerfully admitted that he lived by his wits and his lack of conscience. But back of all this Al had his sense of dignity. Hayes cut him deeply when he dragged him before Marion to apologize. Marion hadn't had time to think about Al in the rush of other events—but found herself wishing, now, that Hayes had not made such an enemy.

Marion was not the only person in New York who was seeking Jonathan Hayes of Kalvik. Every newspaper had men looking for him. The latest exploit of the man who bought Broadway was sensational

enough to whet public appetite for more. It needed a follow-up. Douglas Fox was in a hospital and refused to say anything. Hayes must be found and made to talk or the newspapers were left with nothing to do except repeat vague rumors and retell the things that had already happened. It was a newspaper reporter who brought word of Hayes's discovery to Marion.

"He's in a Mills hotel," the newspaperman said. "It's he. He admits that. But when I said I was a newspaperman and asked him about Fox I thought he was going to throw me through a window! My gosh, Miss Reade, I don't mind taking chances! I take lots of chances. But I'm not stuck on locking myself in a cage with a bear that's got a sore head. Jumping under a subway train is so much quicker!"

"Perhaps he doesn't want to talk for publication." Marion smiled.

"Say! You know that occurred to me, too!" The reporter grinned sarcastically. "But how much good would it do me to tell that to my boss? Now, you're a friend of Hayes. You can handle him. I thought we might make a deal on this. I'll take you to him and you get him to say something for the paper. An exclusive interview, you know. Will you do that?"

"I can't promise results, but I'll try." How different from this day last week, or any time before, when she could promise offhand that Hayes would do whatever she chose! Strangely enough Marion was prouder of her uncertainty than she had been of her complete mastery of the man.

It was a note from Marion, delivered by the reporter, that brought Hayes from the hotel of frugal living to the street corner where Marion waited in a taxi. "I must talk to you," she exclaimed. "Will you ride up to the park with me?"

Hayes seemed strangely apathetic. "Whatever you say," he agreed and got in the cab.

Marion hesitated a little fearfully. "I promised Mr. Small of the *Planet* I would ask you to give him an interview. I had to do that to find you at all! Do you—mind?"

"Anything you wish. If you promised that we must keep your promise."

The reporter rode uptown with them, asking questions. With Marion's help, tactfully offered, Hayes made a statement that confined itself to things which had happened. But it was an interview, an exclusive interview, and Small considered himself richly paid for his trouble.

Dismissing the reporter, Marion glowed with pride. That meager interview, extracted from Hayes, seemed to her an achievement. "Let's get rid of this taxi," she suggested. "I want to talk business to you."

For a time they walked and said little. Hayes was gravely attentive to her. He answered questions, but volunteered nothing. Something in the man was dead. He lacked spirit. Marion could not understand what had happened to him. He inspired in her an overwhelming sense of pity and desire to help. Finally, when they were sitting in an isolated little summer house overlooking the lake, now bleak and wintry, she asked point-blank: "Hayes, you have got to tell me what ails you?"

"What ails me?"

"Yes! Something's wrong. What's happened to you?"

At least she stirred a spark of resentment in him. "That's a funny question—coming from you!" he exclaimed bitterly.

"I don't think it's funny at all! What's the matter with you? What's got into you? What do you mean by running away and hiding? Don't you know I've been looking everywhere for you—and all the newspapers were looking?"

"Good God! Do you think I wanted to talk to newspapermen? Do you think I wanted to see anybody—even you? Do you think I am proud of my disgrace—and want to flaunt it?"

"Disgrace! You're not in disgrace. What are you talking about?"

"Not disgraced? When all the world knows I was partner in that crooked scheme of Fox's. When everybody knows me for his partner—a swindler's partner—a swindler myself!"

Marion laughed a little hysterically. "Have you read the newspapers?" she demanded.

"No," he groaned, "and don't want to."

She laughed harder. "Why, you poor fish! Oh, Hayes, Hayes, you poor, innocent fish!"

Signs of bewilderment showed in Hayes's face.

Marion cried pityingly but shaken still by the hysterical impulse to laugh. "Why Hayes, you're a hero! You're a popular hero to-day—and you run away and hide because you think you're disgraced."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm telling you the newspapers have made a hero of you. What you did to Douglas Fox is exactly what Douglas Fox has had coming to him for years—"

"Do they say that?"

Marion smiled. "Well, not exactly in print. Libel laws are still on the books. But the fact is generally known. It's one of those news items that travels by underground until it gets to be the majority of opinion. And they call you the man who was honest enough to show up Fox even if it cost him all he had. They're all cheering you, because of the way you did it. Hayes, everybody loves a fight—and a fighting man. And if the man fights with some show of right on his side—if he does a thing like you did—why, he's the public's fair-haired boy and that's all there is to it! Wake up! You're a hero!"

"I don't understand it!" Hayes blinked at her with a surprise almost comical. "Now that people know the scheme was a swindle—"

"Bless your heart! They know you aren't a swindler. Sweet lady! Wait till you see some of the editorials. The one in yesterday's *Asterisk*, for instance: Big seven column head in black face, 'Kalvik Island Justice.' And a four-column cartoon and a column of speckle-faced bunk about crooked business men and the man who did the right thing—that's you!"

Hayes exclaimed happily, hopefully: "It's like that? Really?"

"You'll see for yourself."

He was silent for a few minutes and much shaken by her news. "That makes it easier—a lot easier," he said finally.

"Makes what easier?"

"My defeat."

"But, my dear man! You're not beat!

I tell you you're a hero. Why, you've won—"

Hayes smiled wearily. "Won! I don't suppose you realize how amusing that sounds to me. Won! Won what?"

"It's something to win the good will of a few million people!"

"Not to me. That doesn't make up for what I lost—for my defeat. Yes, defeat! I tackled your civilization and it whipped me—whipped me first time—rolled me in the dirt. I thought I was big enough and shrewd enough to measure up to it—and it turned out I was a bigger fool than any of the moths."

"What?"

"Yes, a bigger fool! People may say I'm honest. Why shouldn't they? That's true. But I'm a fool—colossal—ridiculous in my sublime egotism—the poor, trusting dupe of a swindler like Douglas Fox. That hurts me. It hurts my pride. It hurts too deep to be forgotten. That's why I'm crawling back to Kalvik—"

Marion cried: "Wait! Did you say you were going back to Kalvik?"

"Naturally. What else could I do?"

"You're going to—quit?"

"I have quit."

"Hayes!"

Marion looked at him so aghast that the Alaskan began to defend himself.

"I tell you I am through! The public knows I'm a fool. I can't fight against that—haven't any fight left in me. Oh, I know! I've seen how this civilization of yours laughs at the man who's down. It's cruel. It's terrible. I—I haven't the courage to face that. I'm going home—"

Marion cried: "You're not going back! You can't go back. You're going to go through with the thing. You're going to get those sealskins and make your fortune!"

"Make my fortune?" Hayes burst out, angrily. "Get that silly idea out of your head. A fortune! What in God's name do I want of a fortune?" He laughed harshly. "Did you think perhaps I wanted to dress up like an-Eskimo again and give away more gold nuggets? Or perhaps you think I'd like to spend my money on show girls? Perhaps you think I'd prefer to make Broadway my permanent home? A for-

tune! If there's one thing I don't want, that's it!"

"You don't mean that. You don't understand. You can't condemn civilization because you've seen just that side of it. You can do so many things with money—things you would like to do. You can help so many people—"

"No!" Hayes shook his head firmly. "You can't tempt me. There's nothing in the wide world can tempt me. All I ask of your world now is to be let alone. Let me go home!"

"You can't go home!"

"I can—and will—"

"No, you can't. Because you're not a quitter, Hayes. You've something left to do, something you will find is a lot more important than running back to Kalvik Island, when you understand. You're going to stick to this thing—fight it through—until you win those seal pelts—"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you that you don't dare quit!"

"And why don't I dare?"

"Because, Hayes, you can't afford to have the world think you a common liar and cheat."

"Who says such a thing?" Hayes growled.

"Everybody will say it, if you don't fight. The newspapers, the public, everywhere they'll put you down for another Douglas Fox—"

"But you told me that the papers—everybody—praised what I did!"

Marion addressed him with a grim determination. She beat time to her words with her small fist and her gaze held Hayes's attention riveted. "Get this straight! The newspapers are for you—now. Because they believe you're on the level. The minute they figure that you are not on the level—the minute they get a suspicion you might be like Fox—they'll be on your back like a wolf pack. And don't make any mistake about it, my friend, if you sneak back home to Kalvik Island they'll say things and print things about you that will be repeated even as far away as that. Even the Aleuts will hear about it!"

"But I don't understand—"

"Then you'd better understand! Do you think you can come here with all this talk about a fortune in sealskins—and kick up all the fuss you have—build up the reputation you have—and not deliver the goods? You cannot! Hayes, in all your life it was never so important that you show the world you are on the level about those sealskins, than right now. Either that or go down in history as a champion liar and welsher. And the only way you can show them is by *getting* those skins!"

Marion paused, a little breathless in her vehemence, and sank back on the rustic bench, watching Hayes's face. Her words showed one result, at least. The apathy had gone. The man was thinking with brows creased and his big hands were opening and closing their fingers nervously. Hayes slapped his knee.

"You're right; I can't quit now!"

"You must go through with it!"

"I will."

He looked up and about him with something of his old air, his calm confidence. Marion could have cried for joy at the change.

"You bet you will!" the girl repeated. "We'll get a ship. We'll go up there to Alaska and get those skins. We'll bring them back and tell all the world about them. Oh, Hayes, I'm proud of you!"

"It can be done," Hayes declared.

"It's going to be done!" Marion's hand gripped his tightly. She smiled back at him, but saw him only dimly, through a film of tears.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HELP WANTED.

HAYES checked Marion's enthusiasm with a strange look.

"How can I get those sealskins now? I have no money!"

Marion laughed, but not very naturally or happily. "That's good! I was overlooking that little thing altogether. Well, we must find the money."

"Find it?"

"Find somebody to lend it to us or finance the expedition. Will it need much?"

"To charter a ship and hire necessary men will need more than I ever saw," Hayes declared. "I haven't even carfare back to Kalvik—don't know how I would have got back there if I had carried out my threat. To be quite honest with you, I haven't enough to pay for another day's bed and board. I was at the end of the rope when you came."

Marion thought earnestly. "I have almost four thousand dollars in the bank. Would that do it?"

Hayes laughed. "That wouldn't even begin it. But God bless your generous heart for the offer!"

"Oh, well!" She tossed her head. "We'll find money. There's always somebody waiting to spend money on a gamble like that. Money is going to be the least of our worries!"

Hayes looked at her, so confident, so slender and beautiful in that soldierly, trig suit of tweed with the close-fitting hat of felt, her gold hair curling around its brim. She was so perfectly in accord with her time and environment that he did not doubt her.

"But there's one thing," Marion said earnestly. "You'll have to take a brace right away. I mean, you must quit that terrible hotel. Go back to a decent place. Not to spend the way Fox staged things, but to live decently, dress well, keep yourself full of good food so your heart will be full of courage. If you want something in this town, Hayes, you must go out after it looking as if you didn't need it. Remember, 'It's them that has, as gits.' If you're broke I'll stake you—no use frowning; this is absolutely necessary to our plans."

Once more Marion was giving orders and Hayes was obeying them. But there was a difference. The girl's orders had a new tone. Sometimes—often, in fact—they came as suggestions. She was slow in regaining the old confidence in her power. She would hesitate a long time before putting Jonathan Hayes over any hurdles!

Hayes established himself comfortably, as she suggested. He was careful to dress in the conservative good taste Marion advised. In all these details he followed orders explicitly.

He followed her orders, also, in taking his plan to various men who had money enough to back his expedition. Marion worked hard the next four weeks, using her wide acquaintance and pulling all her wires to find and visit all possible sources of backing.

But in one thing Marion guessed wrong. The public admired Jonathan Hayes and would for a few weeks until a newer hero came up; but nobody with money to invest had been impressed at all with the business merits of Hayes's fantastic treasure. Hayes met cordial receptions from curious, interested, sometimes sympathetic men of business, but when they learned he was seeking money to carry out his adventure; that he wanted to spend their money on the vague chance of finding more or less hypothetical sealskins stowed away under a glacier in an unknown bay in the almost equally unknown territory of Alaska, they chilled instantly. They were diplomatic, but they were all equally firm in saying no.

Marion carried the double burden of locating these sources of possible backing and cheering Hayes on to fresh interviews. Hayes was as determined as she, but when for a half dozen times he found all his simple, sincere eloquence slipping off the city businessman's smooth insulation without even scratching the surface, he became bewildered and downcast.

Marion herself was worse hit.

She had rushed into this partnership with Hayes on impulse. She meant to go through with it at any cost. She neglected all other interests in that hope without stopping to think where or to what it led. Continued reverses made her desperate. In that state of mind she encountered Beach one afternoon.

Beach bowed like a man a little uncertain about his reception, but he had no need to be. Marion, for the time, forgot all about their last interview. Her smile emboldened Beach to walk beside her. "And what are you doing since your wild man broke out of his cage?" he wanted to know.

"Starting a circus of my own."

"Not with the same wild man, surely?"

"The same." Marion looked up earnest-

ly. "Beach, somebody in this town is going to help that big boob to get his seal-skins and prove to the world he wasn't bluffing. Somebody has just got to do it! I don't know what it is—there's something sort of pitiful—and tragic about this chap Hayes—something that gets my goat! He's costing me a lot of time—and time means money to me. I have neglected my own work altogether these last few weeks. But I don't care! I'm going to put Hayes across."

Beach smiled warmly. "You're a good little sport!" he said. "But, Marion, is it fair—to Hayes—or to you? Are you sure you're right, fighting his battles for him?"

Marion stopped and her brown eyes flashed. "Right? Listen, Beach, get this straight! I got Hayes into this. He would never have gone on one step but for me. I got him in up to his neck—worse than that; he was buried under the ruins when I found him. Now it strikes me it's up to me to get him out again!"

Beach looked at her with honest admiration. "I don't approve—not for a minute—but I can't help admiring your pluck. It's going to take a lot of courage—and luck—to put this over!"

She agreed so soberly that Beach smiled. "Evidently you haven't found a backer?"

"I have not."

"Tried pretty hard?"

"I've tried everything, and every one!" she burst out irritably. "Talk about a hard-boiled town! Talk about stupid! You can sell a gold brick to every second New Yorker you meet. Sure! Or you can take a tin can, cut a slot in the top and shake it in the subway, and nine out of every ten suckers will drop in a dime and never ask you why—or what you're going to do with the money! Wall Street bankers hire boys without references and trust them to carry a million dollars' worth of negotiable securities. When the boys drop out of sight with a million or so they seem only mildly surprised. But get any New Yorker to invest his money in a sure thing like Hayes? What a laugh! And why? Because he is the real thing; he is also honest, and nobody believes anything so real and honest can possibly be true. That's why!"

Beach smiled enviously. "I can see that you believe in him."

"You bet I do!"

She made a splendid little champion, her eyes flashing, her fists doubling belligerently. She was straight, slender, so very alive, so full of enthusiasm!

Beach sighed. "And if Hayes finds his fortune you'll marry him, I suppose?"

"Who says I will?"

"It seems the logical conclusion."

"Beach, you will mix sentiment with business!" she exclaimed. "Positively, you're mid-Victorian! Marry the poor boob? Why, in Heaven's name? Because I got him in a mess and am trying to help him out, must I necessarily close my act with the wedding march? Not in these times!"

Beach looked partly convinced by her eloquence. "This is strictly business. Really?"

"Strictly business. Why, Beach, it's only common humanity to give Hayes a hand when he's down and out like this. And he is down! The poor devil was all for slinking back home because he thought the world was laughing at him—thought he was a failure when, as a matter of fact, he did a pretty big thing in kicking over the traces. If we want to save his life—make it possible for him to face life with his chin up—we've got to give him this chance to show the world he isn't a four-flusher like Douglas Fox. He's got to produce those seal-skins. Otherwise he'd be a lot better off—dead."

"There's a good deal in that," Beach acknowledged. "And you don't—don't contemplate anything more than that?"

"I have no more intention of marrying him than I had the day he came aboard the yacht, if that's what you mean—"

"Marion, you know I love you—"

"Oh, please, not in the middle of Forty-Second Street!"

"Yes, here and now!" Beach went on hurriedly. "The last time we talked about this I made you an offer. That offer is still open. If you are interested—"

"You mean that you are willing to furnish the money for this treasure hunt?"

"In exchange for your promise to marry me."

They walked in silence for a block. In the bright sunshine of this brisk, winter day, with the eternal crowds streaming about them and the noise of traffic underground, on the surface, overhead, Marion felt that she must be dreaming. Beach's words repeated themselves over and over in memory, but their substance, their thought was too absurd to be real. Was it possible she could consider them!

"Don't misunderstand me," Beach argued again. "If I were asked to spend the money for you, my dear, there would be no string tied to it. For yourself you can have anything that I have without any obligation on your part. But when you ask me to spend my money on another man—a man in love with you—"

"Nonsense! He's not—"

"He is! And you're dangerously near loving him in return. When you ask a thing like that I'm jealous. If I spend one red cent to help Jonathan Hayes it's going to be because I expect to get my reward out of it—and that reward is you! What do you say?"

"I—I don't know."

Marion was in an agony of indecision. Getting Hayes the needed money had assumed an almost overwhelming importance in her thoughts. It seemed to her that his life depended on that, as she had explained to Beach. Her sense of responsibility for the Alaskan's predicament made her a little desperate.

Not very long ago she had turned on Beach angrily for his offer to trade. To-day she heard it repeated, and her first emotion had been a great sense of relief that her search was ended!

Promise Beach? Why not! Last summer she had done her best to hook him as a matrimonial prize. She glanced appraisingly at him. A handsome chap. He had all the advantages of money and of moneyed ancestry. Something of a rounder, to be sure—a midnight son. She pretty thoroughly knew his past. She was bound to marry some day; why not promise Beach—and do Jonathan Hayes a real favor—a favor that would square the dirty trick she had played him?

What astonished her now was that she

hesitated. Yet she did hesitate. "I—don't know."

"Then I tell you what you do," Beach suggested briskly. "Let me know within a week. I'll hold the proposition open. Just call me up—or drop me a line. Just say 'yes' and it will be all right with me. I know you don't welsh on your promises."

"Beach, if I should do that you wouldn't tell Hayes? He must not know—"

"That's hardly fair to the fellow, is it?"

"He simply must not know! I—I don't believe that he cares as much as he thinks he did—or anything like that—and I'm not so conceited that I think this would blight his life or anything of that sort. But—if Hayes knew about this—well, you see, he wouldn't go through with it, that's all. For his own sake it's got to be a secret—until I tell him myself."

"I agree to that, my dear. And your answer?"

"I'll let you know within the week. I—I've got to think it over. I've got to be sure, Beach!"

The next week was one of redoubled effort by Marion. She looked on it as a reprieve, a last minute chance to help out Hayes without making her bargain. She worked with frantic energy and made Hayes work. Time went by so rapidly she lost track of the days.

She sat in a restaurant with Hayes, a quiet little place on a side street, and realized with a start that her week was ended. They talked little during the meal. Both were beaten and realized it. It was hard to keep up the pretense of optimism. Over their coffee they sat in glum silence, Marion smoking and Hayes glowering at the tablecloth. She was astonished to hear Hayes break out with a chuckle: "Marion!" he exclaimed.

"Yes?"

"Marion! Of all the fools—of all the utter fools!"

"What—what's the matter?"

"Why, we forgot the one man in the world who can help me and might be persuaded. We forgot him completely!"

"What man? What possible chance have we forgot?"

Hayes cried exultantly, "Irving Beach!"

"Beach?" Her lips barely whispered the name. The blood stopped flowing in her veins. What freak of chance had put Beach's name into his mind?

Hayes was grinning happily. "The very man! Beach is square. He knows Alaska a little. I think he would believe in me. And I trust him—"

"I—I thought that you—hated—Beach!"

"Hate Beach? So I do. I hate him because of you. I hate him because you love him. If you were concerned in this, if it was a question of your happiness and your love I'd kill Beach, and enjoy doing it—"

"And yet you suggest asking Beach's help—"

"Because you are not concerned."

"Oh!" she whispered uneasily. "Oh—"

"This is between Beach and me and concerns only us. And if I hate Beach, because of you, I'm also willing to trust the man absolutely where I alone am concerned. That's my judgment of Beach—"

"You will see him? You're going to—ask—him—to help?"

"With your approval."

"My approval. I—"

"You are my partner in this," Hayes smiled. "Unless you tell me to do a thing, I refuse to go ahead. I rely on you—absolutely. Well, partner, shall I ask Beach?"

Her lips formed a "Yes."

When she had said it there came the frantic desire to recall the word. But that would mean explanations. She dared not explain to Hayes—not now—when his future hung in the balance. The man was at the end of his rope, and she knew it. If he guessed what had passed between her and Beach he would never go on again. His success, which meant his honor, depended upon her secret. Her 'yes' could not be recalled!

"I'll see Beach to-morrow morning," Hayes announced with spirit.

"No, to-night. You must see him to-night!"

"It's pretty late! Why?"

"Because—" she lied without her usual skill. "Well, I met Beach on the street to-day—and he said—he was going out of town—to-morrow morning."

"Then I'll find him to-night. Right away." Hayes rose.

Marion fumbled through her small purse. She looked up eagerly. "Have you a nickel?"

Hayes laughed. "Of course. Here. Why that tragic look? You begged for that nickel as if your life depended on it. Don't squander it recklessly!"

"No, I won't. I'm just going—to the—telephone—a minute."

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO BRAINY MEN.

DOUGLAS FOX had been keeping to himself.

The promoter had several very good reasons for not desiring to be seen in public. A month of medical care and good surgery had not completely eliminated the reasons; the scars of Hayes's hard fists still disfigured Fox's face.

Fox lived in a big apartment hotel near Central Park. He ventured out only after dusk, and even then, when he passed an arc lamp, he hurried lest somebody recognize him and smile. Fox believed that all New York was laughing at him—a thought that caused endless cursing in new and fantastic profanity.

To be tricked by a big hick from Alaska, to be shown up and beaten by this boob in the presence of newspaper men! Good God, whoever heard of such a mess? Sometimes, in spite of the scars on his face, he could not make himself believe all that had happened to himself—to Douglas Fox!

What maddened him most was that he could think of no retaliation. His hands were tied. He could do nothing to square things with this giant dumb-bell from Kalvik Island—nothing at all except to wish him evil with all his heart and soul. He thought of and discarded plan after plan during his convalescence only to discover that the best he could do was to hate Jonathan Hayes. The utter futility of hating without a chance to demonstrate his hate made the man ill.

Fox's rage reached a climax the day he read in his morning paper that Hayes was

going to take an expedition to Alaska to recover the fortune in sealskins about which all the world had heard. The paper informed him that the expedition had the backing of Irving Beach, well known hunter of big game, who meant to accompany Hayes.

Beach, of all men! Fox remembered how Beach had warned him against the game he had played. Beach believed all the time that the sealskins existed. Now he was going after them.

Fox clasped his head in his hands and groaned loud in his helplessness. Suppose Beach found the skins! Suppose Hayes were on the level—and that he, Fox, were the sucker—too smart to know a good thing when it came along? If that ever got into the newspapers!

He began to rage up and down his apartment, and his wife, who knew his rages to her sorrow, put on her furs and ordered a taxi. To spend the day shopping, leaving Douglas to work off his rage alone, was the part of discretion for Ada.

In the midst of his raging Fox was aware that the telephone kept ringing insistently. Finally he snatched up the instrument and roared an answer.

"Gentleman to see you on important business," said the operator.

"Can't see anybody." Fox slammed up the receiver.

Presently the tinkling began again and goaded him to another answer. "Mr. Fox?" a man's voice asked.

"Well?"

"I want to talk to you, Mr. Fox. Got a business proposition."

"Well?"

"If you don't mind I'll call and explain it—"

"Explain it now."

"It's about Hayes—and his sealskins—"

The unknown got no farther. Fox belated something without words or sense and slammed up the telephone.

Soon after he was aware of a knocking at the door and answered it in a towering rage. No sooner was the door unlatched than, in spite of all he could do, it was pushed open and a man entered the apartment. He was a short, broad-shouldered,

chunky man with an aggressive red-brown beard. He came through the door and shoved Fox aside as if such things were child's play.

"I told you I wanted to talk business to you," the stranger remarked with surprising gentleness. "Now, Mr. Fox, really you must give me a quarter of an hour of your time. Come, let's sit down!"

"Who the hell are you?" Fox demanded.

"My name is Cook. Captain of a schooner. I used to be quite a friend of your protégé, Jonathan Hayes. Perhaps he's mentioned my name?"

"Darius Cook!"

Cook smiled. "I see he has mentioned my name! Suppose we sit down and be comfortable?"

Fox collapsed in a chair and stared at Darius Cook. The promoter's face was beaded with sweat and the hand with which he wiped it shook unsteadily. He attempted an apology.

"You've got to excuse me, Cook. My nerves are all on edge this morning. And when you said sealskins—"

"You've been reading the morning papers," Cook guessed. "Well, I think I can interest you in this little expedition after sealskins. I really think I can!"

"Oh, you do!" Fox snorted with heavy sarcasm.

"Yes, I do. There's a fortune in it for the man who finds that bay Hayes knows about."

"I don't believe it."

"No, I judged by newspaper accounts you didn't." Cook smiled. Fox's face grew red, then purple. Cook tactfully ignored his state of mind. "I believe in those skins," he said briskly. "I believe in them enough so that I'm fitting out a little expedition of my own to get them—"

"You are!"

"I am, indeed—"

"How the devil can you? You don't know where they are—"

"But Hayes does. And I'm going to let Hayes lead the way—then beat him to it. Simple, isn't it?"

"So simple it sounds silly to me—"

"No, it doesn't, Fox! Don't pretend—"

"Who says I'm pretending? I tell you

I don't believe for a minute in this hop-head vision of a fortune in sealskins. What d'you take to get that way—"

"Tut, tut!" Cook remonstrated gently. "You know you believe—now. Because you know Hayes is not a—er—a promoter. He has nothing in the world to gain from this except finding the pelts. Whatever were your opinions, Mr. Fox, you have changed them. And have you stopped to consider just how you are going to feel when the news leaks out that Hayes got the skins? How will you like it when you find the last laugh is on you? Have you thought of that?"

Fox groaned and clasped his head between his hands. "Oh, go to the devil!" he said wearily.

"But perhaps it's not too late. Why not join me and beat Hayes to it?" Cook suggested hopefully.

Fox uncovered his face and eyed his visitor with signs of hope.

Then Captain Darius Cook went on with the air of a man who has nothing to conceal. "I need some backing. If you want to buy a part interest I will welcome you. And, Fox, I also feel that you can be of help in carrying out this plan—a great deal of help. You're a brainy man. In my crude way I also am intelligent. And this is a job for brainy men. Now, does it occur to you that perhaps you and I need each other?"

"Captain Cook," Fox exclaimed with more interest than he had displayed for some weeks in anything but hating, "you've got me interested. Your selling talk is immense. Now let's hear the details. Have a cigar?"

CHAPTER XX.

TROUBLES AND TELEGRAMS.

AL SAPLEY stood before a long mirror in the little parlor of a suite of rooms in the New State Hotel in Seattle. He was costumed strangely and wonderfully—and was admiring the complete effect for the first time.

The bald-headed little crook had a brand new sombrero on his head—a sombrero with

a high-peaked crown and a wide leather band studded with bright brass nailheads. The great hat seemed to weigh him down. His coat was a mackinaw of a pattern so eloquent it might be termed a riot. Red and green were its chief characteristics, red and green arranged in checkerboard pattern, with a complementary pattern of orange and black by way of relief. His lean, corded neck stuck out of a bright flannel shirt, and an orange tie bulged out above the top of a buckskin vest. His trousers were of new and very yellow corduroy, and were stuffed into knee-length leather hunting boots. He had not neglected a pistol and leather holster. Altogether he considered himself equipped to tackle any hardships or adventures a wilderness could offer.

Marion Reade entered quietly, observed the pantomime before the mirror and opened her eyes wide. "Wow! What are you, a dog and pony show?"

Al cackled. "This is my new outfit. I'm *au fait* now for anything in the line of gold camps, placer diggin's, blizzards, stampedes, nuggets, sealskins, polar bears or mosquitoes. First thing this morning I spotted a store where they sell the real thing to loggers and trappers and such like, and I gave 'em orders to fit me out complete."

"I don't think they missed anything." Marion smiled. "You look like a regular six-reel cowboy thriller. I've been out buying some things myself, but I see now I haven't the imagination for this sort of thing. I've got to hand it to you!"

Al wrinkled his brow suspiciously. "Are you kidding me, Marion? On the level, don't this look all right? I told the bird in the store I was going up to Alaska, and he took a good look at me and handed me this. That store's been outfitting men since the big gold strike of '98. They ought to know. Where's Hayes? He can tell me—"

"Not back yet."

"Did he go out with Beach?"

"Yes, to look over the steamer and make sure everything is ready. Don't bother any more about the outfit, Al. It's got to do. We're going to try to get away some time to-night if that chartered boat is ready, as it should be—"

"Sail to-night?"

She nodded.

"Aw, hell, I ought to have a couple of days to break in these boots. They're hurting my dogs something awful!"

"Then you'll have to break them in aboard ship. I don't believe Hayes planned this outing for the health of your feet."

"I guess I'll hustle right out and give the town a treat before it's too late," Al said, brightening.

When he had gone Marion busied herself with lists and memoranda, but she kept wondering about Al Sapley.

A week before they left New York Sapley had come to Hayes. "Say, listen, sucker," Al said humbly, "if I did anything to make you sore I want to square myself. You did a great piece of work when you showed up Douglas Fox. He's had that coming to him for a long time—and I'm strong for you! Can't we be pals again?"

Hayes's forgiveness had been instant and complete. It developed then that Al was in need.

"When you clouted Fox you also kicked me out of a job," he explained. "Of course I'm glad you did it, and all that—it's a fine thing—but these sudden reforms sure raise hell with the innocent bystanders, and I'm bystander-in-chief at this ruction. It's a cold world when you're down, maybe you've noticed that—and I seem to be losing my pep. Ten years ago a thing like being out of a job just made me laugh. Now I can't even get a giggle out of it. Wonder if I'm getting old!"

Hayes, busy as he was, had time to worry about Al. It was he who proposed bringing Sapley on the expedition. "He's useful in lots of ways," he argued. "He's shrewder than any of us about anything that's crooked—and he might come in handy if we did run up against Cook."

Hayes had his way about it, and Sapley was given work. Marion reminded him, "The last time I saw you, you were going to shoot Hayes on sight. What's changed your mind?"

"Say, don't rub it in, Marion! I was wrong, and I admit it. Hayes is one big, fine, square guy, and I'm for him! Ain't that reason enough?"

Marion wondered privately if it were rea-

son enough. The reason did not quite accord with her notion of the man. But Sapley showed a great willingness to do anything he was told. He was used for various errands and performed faithfully. He was a favorite with Hayes, and even Beach admitted it might be well to have one more man on whom they could depend in case of an emergency.

Beach and Hayes came into the room hurriedly. They were wrapped in raincoats, dripping wet, and flushed from the cold air and with excitement. She saw at first glance that something had gone wrong.

"It's the charter," Beach exclaimed, answering her look. "That steamer that was to be waiting—ready for us—isn't."

"It isn't ready?"

"It isn't here! It sailed three days ago for Grays Harbor to load lumber for San Pedro—"

"Why, how could it?"

"That's the queer part of it," Hayes said gloomily. "It's more than I can understand."

Beach explained, "I wired a ship broker here, you know? They wired back that I could get this boat—just what we needed. I wired orders to charter her and money was forwarded. Everything was all right. Then, the morning after we left New York, the broker got a telegram releasing the boat—breaking off our charter—and forfeiting our deposit. Can you beat it? *That wire was signed with my name!*"

"The boat is gone?"

"Gone. Chartered next day to a local shipper and loading lumber right now, I suppose."

"Gone," Hayes echoed glumly, "and as far as we can find out there is not another thing anywhere near her size. Nothing lying idle on Puget Sound that we can use!"

They looked at each other long and silently.

"It doesn't seem to make sense!" Marion exclaimed finally. "That telegram—signed with your name, Beach—"

"A forgery, of course. Anybody might have sent it. I'm having the telegraph people do what they can to trace it. But what gets me is that the sender knew just where to direct his messages—to our shipping

agent and the bank. And who in the world would have a reason to go to all that trouble?"

"Cook! That's my guess," said Hayes.

"Yes, and my guess. Obviously it was done to delay us—and if Cook still has an idea of getting those skins, perhaps by following our lead, he might want to delay us. But the big question is, how did Cook find out?"

"Every move has been a secret among the three of us," Hayes added.

They looked at each other again, long and hopelessly.

"What's this, a Quaker meeting?" Al Sapley had come into the room and surveyed them with astonishment.

Even Al's extraordinary attire passed unnoticed for the time. Ignoring him, Beach said earnestly, "If it is Cook the big thing for us to do is get moving fast. We must have another boat, and right away."

"I should think there would be lots of boats around with all this water," Marion contributed.

"Not the kind we need. But we'll find one—a steamer, if possible. Hayes, I'm going back to the Merchants' Exchange again and perhaps wire to San Francisco."

"I'll make inquiries along the waterfront if you think that will help," Hayes volunteered.

Al chimed in, "Say, ain't there something I could do?"

Hayes, who had been studying him with growing wonder, shook his head. "Better go back to the fancy dress ball," he advised.

At lunch, when they all gathered again, Hayes had a suggestion. "I heard of a schooner we might use," he said. "She's one of the Gloucester type halibut fishers, built like a yacht and able to sail as fast as a lot of steamships. Besides, she has a gas engine for auxillary power. The cargo space is all we need, and there's a chance to get her, I think. The price for halibut is low, and she's laid off. I have the name and address of the principal owner, if you think he's worth talking to."

Beach agreed at once. "She might do very well. And the principal thing is to find our boat as soon as we can. This

telegram business—our broken charter—that doesn't strike me as very reassuring some way—"

"Did the telegraph people trace the fraud message?" Hayes asked.

"As far as they could! It was sent from the Pennsylvania Station the morning after we left New York. You can imagine what chance there is to find the sender!"

The address Hayes had was in Ballard, a suburb. Beach decided they must have an automobile.

"Shall I go?" Marion asked.

"No. Better stay here. The Merchants Exchange is making some inquiries for me. There might be a message, and you can help by keeping track of things."

"Well," Al volunteered brightly, "I don't suppose I could help you much about a ship. I never rented one, except one of those boats on the Central Park lake one time. But I can do *my* bit! I'll just chase out and find a rent car for you."

Hayes watched that queer, boylike figure with its wizen neck and face, flapping its grotesque finery as it hurried down the long dining room. He smiled. "He's always anxious to help! You can't help liking that fellow."

The gray, rainy afternoon wore into darkness, and Marion waited impatiently for the return of Beach and Hayes. Al was in and out of their suite half a dozen times, in high spirits and very busy. "Forgot to lay in some blankets," he explained. "And while I'm about it, maybe I'd better get me a coffee pot and frying pan. What do you think?"

"I would," Marion smiled scornfully. "And if I were you I'd try to buy a patent gold rocker and a collapsible rowboat somewhere. Too bad you haven't a Sears-Roebuck catalogue, it would suggest so many little helpful things!"

"Kid me all you want!" Al cackled, "I ain't going to take any chances on sleeping cold out on some glacier. You never can tell on a trip like this. No, sir! You never can tell!"

The two men came back finally, long past dinner hour. They tramped into the room dripping rain water. They looked weary and very sober.

"Too late," Beach said, answering Marion's look. "Our car broke down. It took that thick-headed chauffeur an hour and a half to fix it—and all the time all it needed was a slight adjustment of the manifold intake!"

"You didn't find your man?"

"We found him," Hayes groaned. "And found that somebody else had chartered his boat—this afternoon! While we were wallowing in the mud around that automobile!"

"Great cat!" cried Al. "There's a hoodoo riding with us!"

"There is," Beach said grimly. "And if this kind of luck repeats itself again I'll begin to think it's more than a hoodoo—"

Hayes agreed soberly. "It begins to look queer. It looks like something more than just bad luck!"

But Marion smiled brightly. "Don't let it get on your nerves!—It won't repeat! At least, I think not. I have found a steamer!"

She handed them a small kodak print with smiling triumph. "Would that answer what we need?" she asked.

Hayes and Beach examined the picture of a small, wooden cargo boat and nodded. "Looks like it! Where? What—"

"A man called this afternoon. He said the Merchants' Exchange gave him Beach's name. He's an old skipper, a tough, battered, tobacco-chewing old downeaster. His name is Blye, and he claims he has the owner's authority to make a charter for this boat. The name of it is the Karluk and it's here in this harbor. He says he can get his crew together, load coal and supplies, and be ready to steam from here by to-morrow night."

"Splendid!" Hayes exclaimed.

"Where is the man?" Beach demanded. "How can we reach him?"

"Waiting at this moment, downstairs in the lobby. I made him wait."

They sent at once for Captain Blye. He proved to be squat and round, running to paunch, but for all that a toughened, alert and capable person of uncertain age. His big nose and protuberant chin suggested a caricature of the first Napoleon. His eye was a frosty blue and he talked with a pronounced Yankee twang, very economical of words.

They were so favorably impressed with Blye that directly they had dined they accompanied him to the water front and took a launch out to the Karluk. She proved to be about what they needed, a small cargo steamer, stoutly built, with sufficient accommodations for their party.

They sat in a chill, damp and rather stuffy little cabin about a table lighted by an overhead oil lamp while Beach and Blye finished negotiations.

"The exact destination of this voyage is our own business," Beach explained.

"Agreeable," twanged Blye.

"The shipping articles can make it Dutch Harbor and other ports of Western Alaska. That will cover it, I think—"

"Right."

"You can find your crew?"

"Got 'em, mostly."

"And get all supplies and coal to-morrow—"

"Yep."

"And we sail?"

"Ten thutty. To-morrow night. From the bunkers, foot of Main Street."

"You hear?" Beach addressed them all. "Everybody must have his stuff aboard and be ready. And, another thing, Captain Blye, all of you, don't talk—"

"Never talk," said Blye.

"Don't anybody talk. The less said about our plans the better. This—this hoodoo—if it is a hoodoo—is not to get any encouragement by knowing what we are about to do."

"Cat's got my tongue," Al Sapley crackled.

"See that it keep it," Hayes advised shortly.

The following busy day it seemed that the bad luck had deserted them for all time. Supplies from the ship chandler's were pouring aboard the Karluk. Blye had a crew rounded up and signed before the commissioner by early afternoon and the steamer shifted to the bunkers where tons of coal went thundering into her hold. Hayes, Marion, and Beach completed a few necessary errands ashore and their luggage came aboard promptly.

Al Sapley was last to arrive. He came in a taxi that was making heavy weather

of it under a deckload of stuff such as few arctic explorers could better. Al had rolls and bundles and canvas bags. Outside these snowshoes were strapped and cooking utensils.

Hayes met him on deck. "What's all this stuff?" he demanded.

"Mine. That's my outfit. The rest of it's coming aboard in a minute."

Hayes frowned. "No, it isn't. Wait! Let me look at it!" He bent over the bundles, unlashng them rapidly. One by one he picked up and threw to one side frying pan, coffee pot, a collapsible camp stove, a canvas water bucket, a roll of blankets, snowshoes, fur mittens—all manner of sporting goods store supplies.

"Hey!" Al piped aggrievedly. "What you trying to do?"

"Outfitting you right. Now, take all that junk ashore. You may keep the rifle—"

"Don't I get nothing else?"

"Not a thing. If I had time I'd make you buy some decent clothes. You'll scare the natives into hysteria! Now, hustle!"

Al turned on the grinning taxi driver. "Shut up!"

"I didn't say anything—"

"You looked it! Get that stuff off'n here. You hear? Show some speed!"

"You've got just five minutes to make it in," Hayes advised Al. "See that you don't miss the boat." Sapley staggered down the plank under a load of duffel; he went meekly enough, but his lips were twisting over whispered opinions of them all, and threats. Yet he was grinning, too—grinning as if all this were a joke.

Lines were cast off and men's voices shouted orders to the dark wharf below. A

signal clanged in the engine room of the Karluk and the vessel began to vibrate to the churn of the screw.

Hayes, Beach, and Marion, wrapped against the drizzle, stood on the bridge where Blye paced, a shapeless, round bundle, supported on two stubby legs set wide apart. The Karluk cleared her dock and pushed into Seattle Harbor. The lights of the city of many hills rose at their right.

Marion grasped Hayes's arm. "We're going!" she whispered. "Old Timer, we're on our way at last! And we're going to put it over, Hayes; I feel it in my bones. Say you're glad!"

Hayes breathed deep. "I'm more than that! I'm thankful. And a whole lifetime won't be enough to pay you back for this wonderful thing you did. You have saved me!"

"I wonder what in the world's keeping Sapley," Beach broke in. "I saw him come aboard. Funny he's not around. He always is when he's not needed!"

But Al Sapley was not aboard. He had slipped ashore one last time, and when the Karluk cleared her dock he emerged from the black shadows of the coal pockets and watched her sail. As he watched Sapley broke into his high, cackling laughter and his mirth doubled him up and held him helpless for a time.

Finally he recovered breath for speech. "Oof!" he gasped. "Wow! Sail—go ahead and sail, you suckers! You boobs! You dumb-bells! That's right, sail! But when you find out what I know—*whoopee!*"

He stood in the dark there, an absurd figure, but venomous in his unhealthy glee, thumbing his nose after the departing steamer Karluk.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

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BY CAROLYN WELLS, Author of "Vicky Van," etc.

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Half a Star

by Louis Weadock

BARNES JEFFREY was in his dressing room taking off his make-up when opportunity knocked at his door. Mistaking the knock for that of the furtive young man who came around every afternoon to sell tickets in the Chinese lottery, he called: "Not to-day."

"Why not to-day?" The voice was that of the moving-picture producer by whom Mr. Jeffrey was employed.

With alacrity Mr. Jeffrey sprang up and flung open the door. In came a round little man with an ingratiating smile. His round little eyes having surveyed the room, their owner announced:

"I don't see no bottle."

"I never drink, Mr. Bloom," said the actor with a touch of pride.

"So?" sighed the little man. "I hoped maybe you'd have a little. If you ain't, you ain't."

"Have a cigarette?"

"I'd just as soon have a marshmallow bonbon," answered Mr. Bloom with distaste. He produced a formidable cigar. "I dropped in," he said, "to see how you would like to be a star."

"At last," ejaculated the actor, addressing himself in the mirror rather than his employer on the trunk. He gripped Mr. Bloom's hands with fingers covered with cold cream.

"If you bust my hand I can't sign no

contracts," warned the sufferer. "I got a A-No. 1 story, and I want you should be a star."

"You don't want it any more than I do," boomed the actor.

"You and Miss Alice Gray—"

The actor stopped him. "You don't intend to star me alone?" he demanded.

"Alone with Miss Alice Gray," said the producer with firmness. He got up.

"Not alone," repeated the actor, aggrieved. "Ah, well, the Brookline people have had agents after me."

The round little man was undisturbed. "I don't care if the United States government has the army and navy after you," he retorted. "I want you should answer me in your own words, 'Yes,' or 'No.'"

"But Miss Gray has no drawing power. She's never been featured," objected the actor loftily.

"Was you ever featured except once in a bum special all exteriors to save expense? Never mind; I'll get somebody else. I never knew why Miss Gray wanted you, anyway."

"Miss Gray wants me?" repeated the actor. "Why, she hates the ground I walk on."

"My," said Mr. Bloom, "how she will hate the sidewalk out of my studio."

"You mean that if I don't co-star with her I won't have my contract renewed?"

"If I was on the witness stand I'd say the same thing," asserted Mr. Bloom, pausing with his hand on the doorknob.

"I suppose," said the actor tentatively, "that her part is so much better than mine that she'd like a chance to show me up?"

"Who could show you up?"

This delicate flattery so touched the actor that he permitted himself a condescending smile. For the smile he had no further use when Mr. Bloom said:

"To show up a lens hog like you is simply impossible."

"Who says I'm a lens hog?"

"Everybody," answered Mr. Bloom, unperturbed. "Everybody says you steal all the footage you can. Everybody says you are jealous if you ain't in every test."

"You've been listening to a lot of jealous actors."

"Miss Gray ain't jealous. Maybe you're a little afraid to work against her?"

Mr. Bloom had touched the right chord.

"I'll play the part," cried the actor, smiting the table. "But to think that she should want to co-star with me. Women are certainly queer things—"

"Maybe men ain't queer, either," and Mr. Bloom bowed himself out.

The actor, leaving the studio, was so busy with his thoughts that he did not see or hear a young woman who called to him from an automobile in which she sat with an older woman.

"Did you see him cut me?" the young woman asked. "Well, I guess I deserve it. I had no business recommending him to Mr. Bloom."

"That Barnes Jeffrey is the most selfish man I ever knew," said the young woman's mother. "I can't tell you how glad I am that you didn't marry him."

"I'm not sorry myself."

"Let's see—that was ten years ago, was it not?"

"Just ten—and the next year he married somebody else."

"And that somebody else," said her mother, "will probably go around now telling people that you helped make her husband a star because you're still in love with him."

The younger woman laughed unaffectedly. "This is a fine business to be in if you care what people say about you," she observed. "I suggested him because he's a good actor. He'll help make the picture a success. He certainly can play that part."

"If I were you, my dear," said her mother, "I'd be very careful that he does not play mine, too."

"Oh," rejoined her daughter easily, "Mr. Bloom will attend to that."

II.

ONE week of shooting showed that the job was too much for Mr. Bloom. He took his grievances to Alice Gray.

"To handle this Jeffrey fellow proper," he confided, "is needed only a lion tamer. That is one thing I ain't. He's stealing scene after scene from you. As an actor he's a reg'lar Jesse Jimmie."

"He is a very good actor who has been very badly spoiled," she remarked.

"Not by me he ain't," Bloom told her. "In self defense I've quit speaking to him. He aggravates my blood pressure something terrible. You should be ashamed of yourself, a nice girl like you, giving him a recommend."

"He can act," insisted the nice girl.

"So can you if he'd give you a chance. When I think of how he'll steal that big scene from you I get goose pimples. He told me, 'Mr. Bloom, we'll make this picture a symphony.' Now, I ask you, as man to man, did you ever hear a symphony with nothing in it but brass? Honest, everybody on the lot would cheerfully donate ten dollars apiece to some rough feller to hit him on the head."

He sighed and went on bitterly:

"But to hit him on the head wouldn't hurt him, and he ain't got no heart."

"Oh, yes, he has," came back Miss Gray. "Haven't you noticed how fond he is of his boy?"

"That boy is getting to be as big a pest as his father," said Mr. Bloom. "If I owned him, which I'm glad I don't, I'd wear out all my shoes on him. A swell-headed little boy is one thing I don't like to have around; yet swell-headedness runs

in that family. His father don't even speak to you, does he?"

"We say 'Good morning' and 'Good evening,'" she admitted.

"I would like to say 'Good night,' to him forever and for keeps," declared Mr. Bloom. "To-morrow comes the biggest scene in the whole five reels we're going to advertise as six. Mark my word, Barnes Jeffrey will steal it from under our noses. Here comes the bad news now."

Thus he indicated the approach of the unpopular Mr. Jeffrey.

The actor bowed distantly, then stopped.

"Mr. Bloom," he said sternly, "I've just been telling that director of yours—"

Mr. Bloom waved a stubby forefinger.

"That's just it," he burst out. "You're always telling that director of mine something. Did you ever quit looking in the mirror long enough to think that I pay him to tell you—not you to tell him?"

"I was just telling him," went on the actor, unruffled, "that he must make sure that in the big scene to-morrow we have absolute quiet. All the time I was working this afternoon some carpenter was knocking—"

Mr. Bloom grinned.

"Maybe it wasn't a carpenter," he suggested.

"I don't care who it was. I want no more of it. If I'm to give you a finished performance I must have quiet—"

"Believe me," broke in Mr. Bloom, with fervor, "I'd be just as well pleased if your performing was finished already. Did you ever stop to think that this picture ain't a game of solitary for you? Even if you don't know it, Miss Gray and I know it, and when the lithographs come out you'll know it, too, if you'll be so kind as to look at something you didn't make yourself."

"The public makes stars—not the printer," said the actor, grandly, and passed on.

Mr. Bloom shook a futile fist behind the receding back.

"Miss Gray, he never even spoke to you. If you give references to anybody like him again, I'll quit speaking to you myself. He's too high and mighty for me, and I don't know how to cure him."

"He may cure himself."

"If my blood pumper don't go back on me," Bloom affirmed solemnly, "I expect to live to be an old man; but I never expect to live to be old enough to see that fellow remember that there is anybody in the moving-picture business except himself."

"Oh, well," she said tolerantly, "let's hope that you'll like the scene to-morrow where the army rescues him and me."

"I'll bet you right now," retorted the disconsolate Mr. Bloom; "I'll bet you right now that Jeffrey will get between the army and the camera."

III.

MR. BLOOM went out upon the lot to look at the set early the next morning.

"It's nice, isn't it?" he asked the director, by whose side he surveyed the layout with as much satisfaction as if he had built and painted it. "Maybe if the acting ain't none too good the setting will make up for it. Anyway, I got it cheap."

"It takes you to pick them out," responded his loyal employee.

"I picked this one out after a fellow that makes serials kicked it out," said Mr. Bloom, with a touch of pride. "It used to be the interior of the Tombs prison. Now it's a room in a fort, but it looks just the same as it used to. Still nobody will kick. People that know what the insides of jails look like don't go around making speeches about it."

He touched one of the walls gingerly.

"I hope nobody leans against the fort," he said; "at least not till after they play the scene. Then I don't care much if it falls on the Hon. Barnes Jeffrey, Esquire. Just what are they going to do in it anyway?"

"Jeffrey is the commander of the fort," the director told him. "Miss Gray is his sweetheart. The enemy is about to capture the whole works when the relief column shows up. She hears the music and tells them they are saved."

"It's a very fine situation," commented Mr. Bloom sagely.

"It's never failed yet," the director told him. "I'm saving you a couple of hun-

dred dollars on the army. I'm having it file past the window twice."

"You couldn't make it three times, could you?" asked the producer wheedlingly.

"I'm afraid not," rejoined the other, with genuine regret in his voice, or with what Mr. Bloom thought was genuine regret, which came to the same thing. "I hope Jeffrey don't grab it all. You know he's been shot in the left arm—"

"Why the left arm?"

"The hero is always shot either in the head or the left arm. If he was shot in the right arm he couldn't hold the heroine, could he? He staggers to this window. He'll probably stagger so well and suffer so much that he'll nail all the sympathy. Miss Gray will tell him she hears the music. He'll collapse, but recover in time to take her in his arms."

"You mean in his arm," said Mr. Bloom. "Couldn't you have him collapse before she hears the music? He could lie right down there and play dead. Then he couldn't steal the scene."

"You don't know him. He could get out of a grave to steal a scene. Here's Miss Gray."

With Miss Gray was her mother.

"I simply could not miss seeing Alice play her big scene," the older woman apologized.

"You're perfectly welcome," Mr. Bloom told her. "None of us wants to miss her."

A camera man, eavesdropping, remarked behind his hand to the actress:

"We're for you. You needn't say I told you, but I wouldn't be surprised if his royal highness didn't get lighted any too well."

"I don't want any the best of it," quoth this remarkable young woman. "He's entitled to as much lighting as I am."

"He's entitled to whatever he gets," said the camera man. "Here comes the conquering hero—only ten minutes late."

Mr. Jeffrey addressed himself to Mr. Bloom.

"My wife and my little boy are waiting outside," he said. "I wonder whether you would object if they came in and watched us play this scene?"

"Why should I object?" countered the producer. "The more the merrier."

"I thank you," said the actor, and moved toward the door whence he had come.

Mr. Bloom's little round eyes roved over the assemblage as if in search of somebody in whom Mr. Bloom could repose confidence. Evidently his survey was not satisfactory, for he moved apart from the others and began to talk to himself.

"He thanked me," he said. "He ain't himself this morning. That's just the sugar he's putting on the pill. Everybody knows that him and Miss Alice Gray was going to be married once. Everybody knows that he married another lady. Everybody knows that his wife is jealous of him. And now, to show his wife that he ain't got no more feelings left for Miss Alice Gray, he brings her here so she can watch him make a monkey out of Miss Alice Gray in the largest scene in the picture. I tell you, Bloom, it ain't right."

He was interrupted by Miss Gray, who asked him:

"What are you doing all by yourself, saying your prayers?"

Upon her he turned a solemn visage.

"If you know some prayers it is best you say 'em," he retorted. "Please, for the sake of the picture, for my sake, don't let your softness for him give him the whole entire scene. He's bound to show off in front of his wife."

"His wife?" gasped the actress unsteadily.

"And his little boy," went on the pitiless Bloom. "That boy that is a number two company of his swell-headed old man. He's gone out to bring them in. I hope I got chairs good enough for them to sit on. There they come."

"I never expected this," said Miss Gray.

"No more did I," answered Mr. Bloom; "but expect or no expect, here they be."

Between the woman who had lost Barnes Jeffrey and the woman who had won him there passed a long, appraising look. The actress saw a faded little woman in whose weak face there lingered traces of an earlier prettiness. One glance showed that her spirit had been broken. The actress want-

ed to shake her by the shoulders and command her to assert herself. Instead, she took the hand which the other extended limply.

"Mr. Jeffrey insisted that we come," said the actor's wife apologetically. "I had so much to do at home, but Mr. Jeffrey insisted that we come," she repeated.

"What dad says goes," spoke up the boy.

His arm was linked in his father's. Miss Gray saw that between the actor and his son there existed an easy comradeship from which Mrs. Jeffrey was excluded.

"I hope you'll enjoy it," said Miss Gray, with a quick sympathy for this little woman whom she never had seen before.

"I hope so," answered the other.

"On the set," called the director.

The actress and the actor took their places. Just outside the camera lines the violinist to whose accompaniment Jeffrey always played his more important scenes touched bow to strings.

"Lights!" commanded the director.

The lights, banks on either side, spots overhead, flashed on.

"Ready," the director called to Jeffrey and Miss Gray. "You know the action. I want you inside the door, Mr. Jeffrey, when we start to grind. I wish you'd give Miss Gray plenty of time to turn from the window before you go into the embrace. Until then please keep out of her way."

"A bold director, this," thought Miss Gray.

She shot a look at Jeffrey to see how he was taking it. His face was impassive.

"You both understand?" asked the director.

"Perfectly," said Miss Gray.

Mr. Jeffrey said nothing at all.

"All right, let's go," said the man with the megaphone. "Action. Camera."

No sound now except the faint splutter of the lights and the monotonous *click*, *click* of the camera. The eyes of all the spectators were turned toward the set, and those eyes saw a strange sight.

Barnes Jeffrey was acting with his back to the camera.

Miss Gray stood at the grated window till the director called:

"You hear the music. Turn."

She turned, her lips parted, her eyes wide.

"By goodness gracious," said little Mr. Bloom happily, "she sneaked in one good look anyway; but here's where he steals the scene."

Mr. Bloom was wrong. Jeffrey did not steal the scene. He did not try to steal it. True, when Miss Gray turned he turned also; but only enough to bring his profile into view. He stared with such intensity at Miss Gray that anybody looking at him was forced to follow his gaze; and when they did they looked upon Miss Gray. He was building up the scene for his rival.

And that is the way he played it. He made it register that it was she who had heard the approaching army. He waited until she got this effect well over before he moved. He skimmed over his collapse so quickly that he held the scene for her. At last, when he put his right arm around her he held her so that it was not his face, but hers, that filled the eye of the camera.

So impressed was the director that he whispered to the camera man:

"Cut, or he'll steal it yet," then aloud, "Cut."

The camera man stopped turning his crank. Although, like the rest of his tribe, he was unemotional, he unbent enough to say to the director:

"That was good stuff; but what was the matter with our best little lens hog?"

"It defeats me," admitted the director.

Before the actress released herself from the lens hog's embrace she turned upon him eyes that were filled with wonder.

"You deliberately gave me that scene," she said severely. "When you gave me the scene you gave me the picture, for that's the scene they will carry out of the theater with them. Why did you do it?"

He looked about warily before he answered. He saw that his wife and his son were talking pleasantly with the mother of the actress.

"I'll tell you," he said jerkily, "but I'll tell you first that it wasn't the easiest thing in the world to do. My wife—"

He paused.

"I know," Miss Gray said; "she might

think that your interest in me was more than professional."

"She might," he conceded; then hurried into his explanation as if he wanted to get through with it; "I didn't know until last night just how I stand with the people I work with. My little boy came home crying. He said that another boy had said he wouldn't play with him any more; said that my boy was the most selfish kid in the neighborhood; that he was growing up to be as selfish as his father—"

He smiled grimly.

"And who do you suppose my young critic was?" he went on. "I made it my business to find out. He's the son of our stage carpenter. Now, I love that boy of mine. I don't want him to be pointed out by other kids as the selfish son of the most selfish man in pictures. It wasn't for you or for myself or for my wife that I gave you the scene. It was for my boy."

"I'm proud of you, Barney," she said, calling him by that name for the first time in ten years. "You'll find that if you think more of others you'll do better work yourself—"

"Oh, I know I haven't been fair," he

answered, with a trace of his old-time impatience; "I haven't even been fair to this ignorant little suspenders peddler, Bloom."

"Not suspenders," corrected Mr. Bloom, pushing his way in through one of the walls of the fort. "Not suspenders—collar buttons. Excuse me for overhearing you, but now I'm here I wish to say a few words. I'd be peddling collar buttons yet if I hadn't treated my customers right. It's the repeat orders that makes the money. I know enough to know I'm ignorant, but if you'll read a couple of books wrote by Mr. Dun and Mr. Bradstreet you'll find I ain't so very poor. I'd be poorer yet if I hadn't thought of the other fellow once in a while. You did elegant by Miss Gray, and I don't care what you say about me."

Jeffrey turned to join his wife and boy.

"I heard the post mortem," Mr. Bloom said to Miss Gray, "and as far as it went it was absolutely K. O."

"As far as it went?"

"There is more yet to come, but don't tell him. Just between you and me, I gave the stage carpenter's kid a dollar to talk to Jeffrey's kid; but that's all right. I'll charge the dollar up to the picture."



THE END OF THE POET

WHAT is he at his best? A man
Who struggles against cruel fate,
For fame an unsuccessful can-
didate.

His verse is very rarely read,
Because it is so very poor,
And is returned by every ed-
itor.

He's wretched, when he dreams of bliss,
He starves the while he feeds on hope;
What wonder if he grows a mis-
anthrope?

So, though his feelings it may hurt,
He apes the "literary gents,"
And writes in tripping lines advert-
isements.

La Touche Hancock.



The Tiger Trail

Part IV

by *Edison Marshall*

Author of "Shepherds of the Wild," "The Voice of the Pack," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOUBTS AND MISGIVINGS.

FREEMAN made a close examination of the soil about the rock. The man who had preceded us had left one clew at least. There was a bare bit of soil just beside the stone where no grass had grown, and in it we found the clear, sharp imprint of a man's heel.

"But it might be the track of the colored man that told us about it," I suggested.

"And it might not be, too. If I don't do anything else I ought to, at least, observe who I'm talking to, and all about him. That darky was barefoot."

"Then it's the track of the man we chased a moment ago?"

"Of course. He'd come up here, just before we did. He either collected the evidence for some amateur experiments of his own, or, what's more likely, destroyed it to protect the murderer. But there's something funny about this print." He bent over it with his light. "You see it's perfectly clear—a perfect imprint. Never saw a better. Ground happens to be particularly sticky, and there are no grass roots to interfere. Probably the water drained off

the stone and softened it, in yesterday's rain. And the odd thing about it is that the heel hasn't any nails in it."

"A rubber heel, then?"

"Evidently—but not the kind of rubber heel you wear. Most of them have some sort of non-skid devices. This heel is solid rubber."

He took a long-bladed hunting knife from his pocket, and with infinite care, cut the earth around the imprint, and lifted it from the ground. I thought it would crumble at first. But the soil itself had a sticky quality, and some of the grass roots around it helped to hold the little cube of earth together.

"It isn't safe to leave it here," he explained. "But I'll be lucky if I get it to the house. And this, Dr. Long, gives us something else to think about."

We thought about it as we walked back toward the house. And I thought of many things else, particularly those never-to-be-forgotten words of the elder Southley:

"My daughter is going to marry Vilas Hayward," the old man had said.

Her face had given no sign whether or not he had spoken the truth. In the seconds that followed, it might have been that

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 1.

she glanced at me. But she didn't hold the glance long enough for me to tell for sure. Her face as it had been was still before my eyes: soft-lined, shadow-eyed. And I was scornful at my senseless optimism that I even presumed to doubt but that her father had spoken the truth—that I was even fool enough to hope otherwise.

Of course she had loved Vilas from the first. Nothing else mattered. She was the kind of woman whose love subjugated all other things. Her kindness to me, the gentleness with which she looked and smiled, might have been simply the expression of a sweet girlishness such as most men, some time in their lives, are fortunate enough to know. And again it might have been contrivance, design, the purpose of which was hidden in the intricate web of the mystery. Perhaps unconsciously I was playing a part in the drama of the old house, and her relations with me were in some mysterious way involved.

Yet I couldn't bring myself to question her motives. It was simply impossible for me to accuse her of actual craft.

But in the test her true feelings had stood forth. She had shown where she really stood. The fact that I was to leave the house in disgrace meant nothing to her. Her love had spread its wings above all such things as this. I had not mattered a grain of dust on the window-sill. Of course I hadn't forgotten her hesitancy. Perhaps there had been regrets—indecision—but the truth had come out in the end.

And it had come out again in the little scene beside the marsh, when I had been ready to leave the estate with the coroner. It was not to be forgotten that her lips had told the detective of my dispute with the Haywards, bringing down upon me a certain measure of suspicion.

I remembered how she and Vilas Hayward had always been together. And it only cost a laugh to remember that I had attributed this fact to the mysterious forces that were at play in the old mansion, rather than to her own wish. Her love for him was evidently the most passionate, intense kind, hardly to be expected in the slender, appealing girl. She showed this fact in her willingness to sacrifice for him.

But why had she been ready to kill him that night in the den? The look in her eyes as she leaned across the table could not be mistaken. Yet many times before, in the long years of the world, women have killed the men they loved. Conditions have arisen in which love itself was the power that pressed back the finger against the pistol trigger. It was not for any man to say. The question went deep into the mystery of a woman's heart. She had tried to kill him, and yet she loved him. He brought sorrow to her eyes; and yet it had made no difference. It was seemingly a love not to be measured. And I wished that I could go beyond the dull, strange reaches of the swamps, and never return to Southley Downs again.

"After all," I heard Inspector Freeman saying, "I don't see why I should worry about these things. Such things as the tracks that the niggers tell about in the road—and that chap who ran away from us on the hill—and all the rest of this funny business. I've got my man, and that's the only thing that matters."

I don't know how much he had said that I had not heard. My thoughts had been too busy.

"So you're sure of it, are you?"

"It's a clear case. Blood-stained shirt—ancient enmity—above all things, the fact that he's the one man, except of course Hayward's own son, that hasn't an alibi. He went outdoors with him. Nothing to it at all, Long."

We climbed the steps of the great house, and parted in the hall. The detective took the clod that held the imprint up to his room to deposit with the shirt. He was to meet me in the library immediately after.

I waited a long time for him to come. And when at last I heard him on the stair, he walked as slowly as pall-bearers with a bier. Every step was distinct and slow, instead of the usual tap-tap of his quick motions.

Then I saw him in the candle-light at the door of the library. And never have I seen such bewilderment upon the face of a human being.

"This is the damndest house I ever saw!" he cried.

He stalked into the room with eyes wide and staring from sheer amazement. He sat down in a great chair, and rocked himself back and forth, his eyes on the floor. And now and then he swore gently, dazedly. I have seen the same look, in my professional experience, in the faces of men just picked up alive after startling automobile accidents.

"You look a trifle upset, inspector," I said. "What's the matter now?"

He turned slowly, still numbed and dazed. "I say the damndest! No case I was ever in had quite the devilish, upsetting, aggravating features that this one has. When I started to put away that clod that held the footprint, I opened the drawer where I had put the stained shirt."

"Yes."

"Somebody had unlocked the drawer with a screw-driver."

"And the shirt was gone?"

"Gone nothing! Some one had just torn a solid square foot out of the front part of the shirt-tail. And it dazed me so that I dropped the clod."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNEXPECTED.

THE moon that night cast eery squares of light on the floors. The orchestra of the marshes started up again—the call of birds, the noise of insects, the rustling of branches, all deeply remote and hushed. In the daytime the occupants of the manor-house had all been ordinary, sensible Aryans, not afraid to look in a dark corner. In the night, you could see a different expression on their faces.

I kept remembering the strange legend of the tiger. Then I thought of Ahmad Das, and the theory of reincarnation; and finally came around to the memory of those two curious scratches on the face of the dead man. Again and again I had that same cycle of thought.

I had the drawing-room to myself, except for the younger Southley. The detective was at work in his room. Southley himself had gone into the den: whether he had come out again I did not know. The

negroes had retired to their cabins, as usual in the latter part of the evenings. Vilas was in the library, trying to read.

I don't think he was having any too good success. The last two days had made stupendous changes in Vilas. He had picked up two or three little nervous habits, too, that were particularly distressing to watch. The mysterious death of his father was of course the greatest influence; and the ever-present menace, the shadow and the darkness, had stretched his nerves almost to the breaking point.

I had noticed a curious thing, as evening drew on. It seemed to me that the other occupants of the house were avoiding Vilas. Perhaps it was just coincidence; yet the thing had happened three or four times. From eight to ten he had spent most of his time roving from one room to another. Whoever was in the room when he came greeted him courteously enough, but soon had business elsewhere. I saw it work out with not only Southley, but his daughter as well. Of course there were reasons; but I couldn't even get a glimpse at them. I imagined that Vilas would not have cared to be alone in the library at that moment, if there had been any other choice. From time to time he summoned the servants, seemingly for the most trivial services.

About eleven I walked out onto the grounds, mostly because the atmosphere of the house had begun to strangle me. I wanted fresh air, the wind blowing off the water, the sight of a friendly moon in the sky. Of course the tragedy of the night before had occurred outside the house, on the very hill on which I stood, but there remained the feeling that the crime had its root and source and causes in the house itself. But the moonlit hillside wasn't much of a relief. What wind there was brought curious smells from the marsh. The moon looked wan and pale and strange.

There was a light in the power-house—a little building at the rear of the manor-house that contained the engine that had previously generated electric light for the house. Hoping for a friendly word from some mellow, African voice, I walked around to it. The workmen were busy at the plant, trying to repair the break.

But the workmen weren't colored people, after all. They were bending over the engine when I first approached the door, and I couldn't see their faces. They didn't hear me coming in the soft grass, and they seemed very intent. Then they started up as my foot grated on the threshold.

One of them was the elder Southley. The other was the lean, bewhiskered old man who had brought the boat—Robin, he called himself. I noticed just one impressing thing about him. He wore rubber boots.

He was the only man on the plantation, as far as I knew, that did. They were little, ankle-length, quaint affairs; and I was amazed at my own stupidity that I had not remembered the fact before. I had noticed the boots the minute he had stepped from the motor boat. They had plain rubber heels, such as had made the track we had found on the hillside, beside the white stone. Beyond all doubt or question, he had been the man we had chased just after nightfall.

My eyes leaped over him. He had long legs—the kind that could stride swiftly. He was agile, too.

"Howdy, sir," he greeted me. "Would you like a job?"

Southley looked up with a smile.

"We're trying to get these lights so they'll work," he explained. "I'm getting tired of candle-light. I don't suppose you know anything about electric generators."

"I knew quite a bit about them when I had the engineering bug—in college," I confessed. "I might be able to help you."

Then I had a curious impression. It seemed to me that a swift expression of apprehension and dismay flashed across my host's face. It wasn't in the least distinct. And it was so senseless a thing I concluded I had been mistaken. Robin looked up, too, somewhat quizzically.

"I can fix the thing," he said hurriedly, "and besides, I need the job."

"I guess he can do well enough," Southley agreed.

But I couldn't resist the impulse to make a cursory examination of the generator. Perhaps it was love of the engine. Perhaps it was that irresistible human impulse to

tinker—and more than that, to exhibit knowledge. At first I found it difficult to believe that the plant was really severely damaged. It looked in the most perfect condition. But Southley called me away in a moment, and invited me to walk back with him to the manor-house.

Inspector Freeman would have been dismayed if he had known my thoughts as Southley and I went back to the drawing-room. For before another hour had passed, there was to be further amateur interference in the working out of the Southley mystery. Even while I chatted with my host, I was planning the best means to get back to the power-house. I was going to keep a close watch on that garrulous, long-legged longshoreman, Robin.

In some way that I was yet to find out, he was involved in the problem of Southley Downs. He had washed the blood from the rock on the hillside. He had eluded the inspector and myself in the chase in the darkness. Now I had found him with Southley working upon the engine in the power-house—and yet they had seemed merely to be examining it, rather than at work. I remembered that neither of them had held tools in their hands, or even seemed to have any tools with them.

I was suddenly deeply suspicious of this man Robin. I remembered that he had volunteered his services to the negro Sam, and that looked as if he had business of his own at Southley Downs. His excuse for coming seemed somewhat trumped-up. Besides, he looked his part too well. He was too perfect an example of a certain type of squatter. He had an English accent, and I had been watching all through my visit at Southley Downs for the intrusion of some one with such an accent.

Roderick, of whom Alexander Pierce had told me, who evidently had not yet put in his appearance, had lived long years in England. The names were somewhat similar, too; and I had heard before of that peculiar trait of human nature that influences a man against giving up his own name altogether. The alias he adopts is usually somewhat similar to his own name.

I made a feint of going back to a book. Southley seemed relieved. He left me in a

moment, and joined his daughter in the den. Vilas had gone to his room, and lost as it was among the many, breathless corridors of the great house, I could imagine it was the last place in the world he had really wished to go. I drew my chair up to the great dormer window that overlooked the power-house. And I didn't see one word of the type beneath my eyes.

The hill was swept by moonbeams. There was a silver path across the face of the swamp, leaping ever to my eyes. I waited possibly five minutes. And then I saw Robin emerge from the power-house.

For a long minute he waited in the shadows, and my suspicions leaped to a certainty. Then I saw him steal away toward the edge of the marsh.

A minute more and I was out in the darkness too, trying to shadow him. I tried to keep to the less open part of the hillside and yet not lose sight of my quarry. He walked slowly at first, and I shortened the distance between us to one hundred yards. As yet I had no reason for thinking he had seen me. His own form was perfectly visible in the moonlight, but I had kept mostly in the shadow. But all at once he increased his pace.

I walked faster, too. My quarry broke into a slow trot. It was impossible that I could run behind him and still keep out of sight. So I made a furious dash toward him at top speed.

For a moment I thought I would overtake him before he saw me; but when I had covered half the distance between us he began really to run. He straightened out his long legs, and fairly seemed to fly—straight for the marsh at the bottom of the hill.

"Stop, Robin!" I shouted at him. "Stop at once!"

He only increased his speed. I never saw a man run faster. I was in good condition, and I gave him the best I had. He hadn't the chance to elude me that he had in our previous encounter earlier in the evening. The moon was out now.

He splashed across a pond of shallow water at the base of the hill. Possibly he thought I would not follow him here. But he was to be disappointed. No water was

deep enough to throw me off now. I was going to find out his connection with the crime if I had to follow him to the mainland across the swamp.

But at once he splashed out of the pond and circled back up the hill. I was soaked to the knees, but I gave it no thought. Of course he couldn't run so fast up the steep slope, nor could I. And my breath was coming in great sobs before I approached the house.

He swung about the great structure, and I dipped far enough to one side to watch. I saw him slip into the postern door that led to the library.

Twenty seconds later I entered the same room. Evidently he hoped to elude me in the maze of rooms. But he had forgotten one thing.

His boots—the same boots that had left the telltale track beside the rock—were splashed with mud and water. They made a trail across the rugs and hardwood floor of the library. And they turned into the den.

Once more the drama of Southley Downs had shifted to this little room. Once more I stood at its threshold. And I had a curious sense of portentous developments that would come to pass within its doors.

Southley and Josephine were standing up near the same table that had figured in the drama of the previous night.

"Close the door," Southley told me.

"But where is that man Robin? I saw him rush in here. And I know he has something to do with this mystery."

"Robin? You mean the man who helped me in the power-house?"

A large blue portière hung at the side of the den, and out of the corner of my eye I saw it waver. No wind blew it. And then, looking straight, I saw the ends of white fingers that clutched its folds.

"Mr. Southley, the man is behind that curtain now!"

Then the man behind the curtain answered me himself.

"Oh, old Doc Long!" came a familiar voice. "You're the most persistent devil!"

There is only one person in the world that calls me "old Doc Long." The hope of hearing his voice about this cursed house

of the Southleys was dead in my breast. It was the voice of the man I had longed for, whose keen brain and able hands would so quickly bring light where there was shadow.

He pulled the curtain aside, and gray eyes laughed at me. I saw through the disguise at last, and marveled at my blindness heretofore. Of course it was no one but my old and trusted friend, that world-famous detective and fisherman Alexander Pierce.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

AFTER we had got through pounding one another on the back and roaring out what a pleasure it was to meet again I began to put a few questions to the great detective. And all the time I marveled at his disguise.

"But why didn't you let me in on it?" I demanded, just a little hurt.

I saw laughter in his fine eyes, but his face remained grave.

"You were doing so well without me, doc," he replied. "And the way you chased me through the mud—it was rich, my lad! What a persistent devil you are! Miss Southley—if ever this young man gets on your trail, you'll never be able to shake him off."

"Miss Southley already knows that," I commented. "And look at my trouser legs—my best dinner clothes. You are a trifle wet yourself."

"These beautiful boots protected me." Then he grew serious. "Besides, Long—among your many talents I'm afraid you can't claim to be an actor. Just a look—a word—might have given me away. It was much better that you devote your attention to the excellent work Inspector Freeman has been doing. And as to the reason why I came in disguise—I don't believe the time is quite ripe to divulge it. I assure you that it served my ends very well."

"But it seems you trusted every one else." I glanced toward Southley and his daughter.

"Naturally Mr. Southley knew it. I came at his invitation—and your own, of course, too, Long. Miss Southley learned the truth just this evening, and I consider it a distinct reflection on the ability of her father and myself to judge character that we waited so long in making her an ally. But I will say—it's more her father's fault than mine."

"You must remember that my acquaintance with my daughter was somewhat slight," Southley explained. "She has been away to school so much—only here a few weeks. Besides—she did know a few things. I'm sorry I didn't tell her more."

Father and daughter exchanged smiles. Josephine herself seemed changed. It was curious that I had not noticed it the moment I stepped into the room. There was a new light in her eyes, a rising of the delicious color that played ever in her cheeks. Again I saw the smile that I had marveled at that night in the drawing-room long ago. Evidently there had been developments in the mystery of which I was not aware.

"Remember, we will need your son too," Alexander told my host.

Alexander and I walked together into the drawing-room, and we had a minute's talk at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm going to my room now," he explained. "It's a maid's room on the third floor, but it fits my purposes perfectly. I have a few chemical experiments to make."

"Of course it was you who destroyed the evidence on the white stone."

"Not destroyed it. Merely gathered it up. I wanted to make some blood tests. And it pained me to cause you and the inspector so much disappointment."

"I imagined it would!"

Then we had a little laugh together. It was all too plain that a deep professional jealousy existed between such free-lance experts as Alexander and staff detectives like Inspector Freeman.

"But why in the world did you tear that piece from Ahmad's shirt?" I asked.

Alexander laughed again—a boyish, joyous sound that died quickly in the silence of the room.

"I'm afraid that is evidence of my quixotic nature," he said. "But I had to

have a sample of the bloodstains; and I knew it would break Freeman's heart if I took the whole shirt. So I just tore out the piece."

He sobered and became very business-like. That was one of the marvels of the man. One minute he was the best of comrades—boyish, laughing, irresponsible. The next, he was the cool-headed, tireless sleuth with every nerve and muscle alert.

"There's work for to-morrow," he went on swiftly. "You'll have your part to do. So will Southley have his part, and his two children. To-morrow I'm going to take the boat on a little expedition—over to the plateau. You are to meet me on the path at my return—just after nightfall. You can have the inspector with you if you like. Southley and his daughter will be close about, and they will know their parts. The hour to strike is almost here."

"And Vilas? What about him? And Ahmad?"

"Ahmad is the suspected murderer. I'm afraid Vilas won't do."

"But Josephine Southley would think otherwise," I told him with some bitterness. "You must know—that they are allies. You couldn't have missed that point."

"Allies?" he echoed coldly. "What do you mean?"

"She's going to marry him—that's what I mean. And she's bitterly against me. Thinking that her lover might be accused of the murder of his father, she told the detective things that implicated me and got him to hold me here."

He turned and started up the stairs.

"Sometimes, Dr. Long," he told me slowly, "your mental grasp is quite astonishing—for its perfect and abounding aptitude to make a fool of yourself."

And he left me to ponder in the halls below.

Inspector Freeman—who had learned the truth at last—and I walked down to the shore with Pierce at eleven o'clock the next morning. The rowboat waited for my friend, and in it were two strong colored men to row. Alexander had put on hip-boots and was armed with a heavy rifle. And it was plain to see that Freeman was

entirely contemptuous of the whole proceeding.

"You're a funny one, Pierce," he spoke jokingly—and at the same time meant every word he said. "In the first place, coming with all that stage scenery on yourself. It takes one of you correspondence-school detectives to do stunts like that. I suppose you thought that the murderer would recognize your determined face from your picture in the newspapers—and make himself scarce before you could get out the handcuffs."

"Rather a different reason, my dear inspector," Alexander answered him as he began to slip the great cartridges into the magazine of the heavy rifle. "It wasn't the murderer I was so frightened of. In the first place, I didn't want you to leave the scene in disgust, as you might have done upon recognizing me. You were doing too good work."

"You needn't have been afraid of that. The man was already in my hands. And I'm glad you appreciate the work I have done."

"Perfectly, Freeman, perfectly. It was particularly clever the way you found the shirt."

"Of course, you were in the hall all the time."

"Of course. I wondered what you and my good friend Long were going to do."

"I suppose you know that the shirt is going to put the noose about Ahmad's neck?"

"One can never tell, inspector."

"It's a piece of evidence that cannot be questioned—although I admit the final tests as to the authenticity of the stains has not yet been made."

"And besides, Freeman—there are other reasons why I thought it best that certain occupants of this house didn't recognize me," Alexander went on seriously. "It would help out in the end. I confess I don't care for disguises as a rule. And now I must bid you good day, and go search yonder jungle for the murderer of Hayward."

Freeman laughed uproariously.

"With a rifle, too!" he exulted. "I'd think you were going elephant hunting. Of

all the quixotic enterprises! You can't believe that the murderer is still at large, when I have him under my constant supervision in the house! Pierce, I have every admiration for your qualities, but I assure you you are making the mistake of your career."

"Every one has to make mistakes sometimes, inspector," Alexander returned quietly. "Besides—I don't suppose you remember about the breaking of the levee—how the murderer would have time to cross the isthmus to the plateau, but couldn't possibly go farther?"

"I remember that perfectly. But the real murderer didn't try to cross at all. He came back into the house."

"Then there's the matter of the scratches—and the legend, and the rest of it. None of these things must be overlooked, Freeman. And I'll meet you both soon after dark."

We watched the negroes row away across the dark swamp water. He was gone all afternoon. Once it seemed to me that I heard the far-off echo of two rifle-shots, but I couldn't be sure. Freeman continued his investigations. Vilas walked about on the green hillside like a hunted man. The long afternoon waxed hot, the shadows lengthened, the sun cast its glamour over all the waste of the marshes. Twilight dropped like a white mist, and the stars began to crop out of the sky. The night life of the marsh awakened—insect and wind and bird had their chorus.

I don't know where my thoughts were that long afternoon. I tried to read for a while. It wasn't a success. I knew that my stay at Southley Downs, so often threatened, was at its end at last. Tomorrow we would all cross the marsh to testify at the coroner's inquest; and I would never return to Southley Downs again. The mystery and the charm would go out of my life to stay, as the swamp-water glided beneath the boat.

It was after nine when I saw the flash of a lantern across the water. Thin clouds were in the sky, and the moon had not yet risen. The whole wilderness world was blotted out by the shadow, and the soft light over the water brought a queer flood

of thoughts. I welcomed its approach. At the moment it seemed the only reminder that life still existed about this great, bleak estate of the Southleys. Without it, it might have seemed a realm of death, where human beings never came. And besides, the great Alexander Pierce was returning from his expedition, and I did not know but that this gleam across the wastes was the breaking of the light of truth in the darkness.

I heard a step behind me. It was Inspector Freeman.

"I see he's coming just at the time he promised," he said with a note of wonder.

The boat drew up to the shore, and the colored men got out to make it fast. The lantern light was dim, and I could not see plainly. It seemed to me that something was huddled in the bottom of the boat—something rather large—but I couldn't see what it was because a rubber tarpaulin had been thrown over it. But I did see Alexander's face. He held the lantern up to look at us, and it showed his features plainly. He seemed curiously intent.

We walked up the path, and three shadows made black streaks across the light that the lantern threw. They were of the three Southleys, who had come out of the house to meet us. They also seemed grave, determined. Something gleamed in the old man's hand. As Alexander held the lantern high, I saw what it was. It was a pistol.

"What's this?" Alexander asked.

"Vilas's pistol," Southley replied. "You told me to get it."

"How did you do it without arousing suspicion?"

"Took it from the drawer in the library table. He keeps it there in the daytime. Usually carries it at night. Ernest and I left him with the excuse that we had to talk to some of the colored laborers at their cottages. Josephine just slipped away."

Alexander turned to Ernest. "How about the candles?"

"Two burning in the library. All the others have been misplaced, as you directed."

"And the servants?"

"No one in the house but Ahmad."

The inspector suddenly gasped. "But I tell you that isn't safe," he cried. "He'll get away. Alexander, you promised to keep a watch out for him. He'll be gone when we get to the house."

"I promised I'd see that he didn't run away," Alexander answered wearily. "He'll be there when we come. Don't fear, inspector." He turned to the others. "Then everything is ready. Miss Southley—if you will go with Inspector Freeman. His arm is strong and his aim sure. Southley, you and Ernest can take the south windows. You, Long, will be an unprejudiced witness. But you've got to know how to walk silently."

"I know how. I've stalked deer in the West."

"Good. Then you'll come with me. And now—out goes the light."

He lifted the lantern and turned down the wick. Then he blew out the flame. Of course I understood. In our present position, at the base of the hill, it would not be visible from the windows of the house. It would be visible as we approached the house.

And just as the shadows fell a hand touched mine. It was a warm hand, and soft, and the fingers rested a single fluttering instant in my palm. It was a little hand, too, and I had in a single instant of never-to-be-forgotten knowledge of its power to soothe and hold, and a tenderness beyond all reckoning. And I knew whose hand it was.

"Maybe you can understand after this," she whispered. "Perhaps you won't condemn me so."

Then like a squad deploying in battle, we started climbing up the slope of the hill.

CHAPTER XX.

WITHIN THE ROOM.

WE soon left the others in the darkness. Alexander and I crept to the postern door.

"One sound will spoil the play," he whispered to me in the instant that we waited at its threshold. "Keep your ears and eyes open."

Then we crept through into the little hall. The door into the library was open, but scarcely any light came through. So deep was the shadow that Alexander was at once invisible.

We lay down on opposite sides of the hall, so that we could look through into the library. But we left the passage open, as Alexander had instructed. The reason was simply that he thought the man we had come to watch might want to make an escape through the doorway, and it would have spoiled the plan for him to see us on the way out. Lying close to the walls, it was likely he would pass us by. But after one glance through the doorway I felt sure that no such attempt would be made. The darkness of the hillside where Hayward had died would, in this man's mind, seem more terrible than the room itself.

The library at Southley Downs was tremendously long. It had rows of windows at one end, and the other opened into the hall. The tapestries and furnishings were rather dark, after the manner of Victorian libraries. At one side was built the great fireplace, now cheerless and cold. There were rather many curtains that wavered when the wind blew. The wind was blowing now. We could feel it, damp and strange from the marsh, against our faces.

In a chair beside the fireplace Vilas Hayward sat alone. A book was before him on his knees. A single candle burned on the table beside him, and another stood on a little stand at the opposite side of the room.

When I say that Vilas Hayward sat alone I do not mean that there were no other occupants in the room. There was one other, and it is true that at first I didn't see him at all. He kept at the very edge of the candlelight, and he moved so softly, so unobtrusively that it was very easy to ignore his presence. It was Ahmad Das.

A white face is always comparatively visible in dim light. That is why soldiers going on to No Man's Land at night darkened their faces with lamp-black. But Ahmad's face was naturally dark, and it blurred in our sight. Sometimes I saw the whites of his eyes when the candlelight shone on them. Vilas Hayward was not

trying to read; and the fact that the light was too dim for easy reading had nothing really to do with it. He was watching Ahmad Das out of the corner of his eyes.

The lighting effect was one in which a great artist would have rejoiced. It was yellow and dim, of course; and perhaps it had a quality of unreality. The atmosphere of candles at any time is distinctly medieval. Then there was the gradation of shadows—dusky close to the fireplace, but shading off to a deep, intense black. The light from the two candles met at the very extremities, leaving a dusky path between. Vilas's head and shoulders cast a distinct shadow on the wall, blurred, however, by the effect of the candle across the room. The shadow thrown by Ahmad was something gliding and dusky and dim against the curtains of the windows.

There was an effect of silence, too, possibly induced by the accentuation of the faint sounds that were present. It seemed to me that I could hear distinctly the rustle and whisper of portières dragged on the floor by the wind. A window shade wavered with the faintest stir of sound. Then there were the hushed, manifold sounds of the night that came hushed and strange through the noises—noises so obscure that the ears had to strain to perceive them.

Vilas's face was lighted by the nearest candle. I could really see it more plainly than any other detail in the room. The fact fascinated me at first. All other things were dim and blurred and unreal; but it was sharp and clear. And even this early in the drama it had a quality that was disturbing to the spirit. He had endured much these last three days.

Perhaps the quality lay in the curiously deep lines. I had never seen lines so deep. They seemed to cut the face in segments. The whole posture was unbelievably tense and alert, in spite of an obvious effort to make it seem at ease. His eyes were wide open, and there seemed to be a peculiar fixation about their pupils that in my medical experience I had seen just once before. And that once I didn't care to remember. Of course I couldn't see the pupils themselves; yet the eyes in general gave that impression.

But none of these things were true of

Ahmad's face. Whenever it came in the range of the candles it seemed inscrutable and calm as ever. The eyes were simply coal-black places in the dusky skin.

He was evidently at work at his household tasks. He busied himself about the room. At first he arranged the articles on the table, straightened the magazines and the books. Then he took a dust-cloth and began to wipe off the furnishings. It was then that he began to go often to his knees. And all the time Vilas was watching his every motion.

"Good God! Where is every one?" he exploded at last. "Ahmad! Ahmad Das!"

The servant arose and came near him, half obscured in the shadows. He stood straight and tall.

"Yes, *sahib*—"

"Where is everybody? Southley and his son ought to be back by now. What direction have they gone?"

"I do not know, *sahib*. They told me they were going toward the cottages of the laborers. But they did not turn that way after they had gone out the door."

"And Miss Southley? She was to join me here."

"She has gone, too. I don't know where. The detectives are spending the day across the marsh—on the height."

"But it's time they were back by now. Good Lord, what did they go there for, when the trouble is here? Here, I tell you, and you know it, too, Ahmad. You know it too devilish well."

"I do not know what the *sahib* means."

"Damn your black face!"

Then Vilas tried to regain his self-control. We saw him struggling. The fight was inscribed on his face. And it was a hard fight, too—a losing fight. For a long moment he was quiet, and Ahmad Das resumed his furniture dusting. He bent lower and lower, and once more he was on his knees.

And now I didn't look at Vilas. My eyes were frozen upon Ahmad Das. His position, as far as externals were concerned, was one that every housekeeper gets in many times a day. But there was something different about this. There was a luxury, a passion, in the way he spread his long body

on the floor. I can't describe it except to say it was as if he felt a rapture in it. Nor was he calm any more. There was a strange nervousness upon him, like an intense eagerness, and his lips were drawn, ever so slightly. He crawled about so slowly, his body so close to the floor.

Then Vilas spoke again in the silence—the words sharp and clear. My eyes flashed to him. He was leaning forward in his chair, every muscle set, every tendon rigid.

"Ahmad Das!" he commanded. "Go and get some candles."

But Ahmad Das kept at his work as if he had not heard.

Vilas stood up, but he did not cross the room.

"Hear me, Ahmad?" he cried again. "Don't you hear me, man? Get some more candles!"

"Candles, *sahib*?"

"Candles! Get them at once."

"I cannot, *sahib*," the Hindu answered from the floor. "They are all gone but these two. Every one. I can not bring more."

"Then I'm going out to look for Southley."

"He will be hard to find, *sahib*. There are shadows and water and jungle between." Then Ahmad's voice seemed to grow indescribably eager. "You will need a guide."

"A guide—what do you mean?"

"If the *sahib* goes, I will take him there. The *sahib* must not start out in the dark alone! And if the *sahib* has despaired of Miss Southley meeting him here, and wishes to go to his room, I will go thence with him, too."

Vilas Hayward suddenly snatched open the drawer in the table. For an instant his frenzied hands thrust at its interior; then he whirled toward Ahmad.

"Where's my pistol?" he cried. "It was in the drawer—"

"Perhaps one of the detectives borrowed it for the hunt to-day—"

Again Vilas flung into his chair. Again Ahmad went back to his dusting. His motions seemed to grow more sinuous, more silent. And now I looked in vain for the cloth. He seemed to have dropped it.

"Does the *sahib* wish to go look for

Sahib Southley?" he asked. "If he does, I will be glad to go with him—"

To me the words seemed charged with some terrible kind of passion. The effect that they had on Vilas was not pleasant to see. The manhood seemed simply to go out of him. His lips were loose, his eyes protruded, shaking hands reached for the chair-arms.

"No, you devil!" he cried, his voice rising. "You won't get me out there, where you got my father."

"*Sahib*!"

"And I order you to get up off the floor. You're not working now. Get up, or I'll kill you where you lie!"

Ahmad Das got up. He rose very softly to his full height. He tiptoed across the room. And he blew out the light on the little stand.

CHAPTER XXI.

ILLUSION.

THE shadows deepened. There was only one candle now, the one that burned on the table. And I heard a soft, whispered sigh from Alexander.

"The man's a devil," he breathed in my ear. "Vilas called him by the right word."

"Then get up and save him," I answered. "Do you want to see Vilas murdered before our eyes?"

"Hush—and watch."

We watched. A long time there was silence. Ahmad Das stood still beside the extinguished candle.

"What are you going to do?"

It was Vilas, questioning from his little circle of candlelight. And no words can tell the depth of terror that was in that question. His nerves had already been stretched to the breaking point by the tragedy and horror of his father's murder. There was impotence in the question, too, and at the same time such a dread as only lingers in the most remote, shadowed places in the darkest realm of human thought. It was plain to see that he was near to a complete nervous and physical collapse.

"Do, *sahib*?" The answer came at last, trembling with some unearthly kind of pas-

sion. "It is not well to be improvident with candles. The detectives might need a brighter light when they return to see what remains here."

Vilas tried to meet the snaky eyes.

"What do you mean?" he whispered.

"They will come back soon, and want to talk to their guest. One of their guests is gone—you know where. Yesterday they bore him across the water. You only remain, and you are very dear to them, *Sahib Strumburg*."

Vilas leaned forward. "Strumburg? How dare you call me that? My name's Hayward—"

"Once Strumburg—then Roderick—then Hayward—what does it matter, *sahib*? Names die when their bearers die."

"But I'm not Strumburg. I tell you I'm not—"

"I will remember, *sahib*, that you told me that. But consider again, and see if you don't want to make me another answer."

"I'll never admit it."

"I will go from you for a minute, *sahib*—just a minute into the darkness—and then I will return. I will want your answer then. And there might be other things for you to tell me, too, when I come into your presence a moment from now. You really had no proofs that *Sahib Southley* is wanted in prison."

"But I have! You can't scare me out of it."

"Both things you can answer when I return to the *sahib's* presence. It will be just a little moment—"

Vilas half rose in his seat, ordering the servant to relight the candle. But Ahmad didn't obey. Rather he faded. The shadows hid him, and darkness closed round him.

Yet it wasn't as if he had completely gone. I knew that he was waiting somewhere in the darkness just beyond—perhaps behind the curtains, possibly in the hall. I didn't hear or see him. I simply knew he was there, and in a moment more would come back into the light for the answer to his questions. A long moment passed away. The house was tense and still. And once more I looked at Vilas Hayward.

He had his head turned over his shoul-

der, and he was watching with fascinated horror something that approached him in the darkness. I couldn't see what it was at first. It was farther away from me. But yet I was aware of the sense of something moving—something half crawling, half sliding toward the man in the chair. And then I saw an irregular gray patch of shadow that was not quite so dark as the shadow around it—a patch which seemed to be moving. And all at once it halted.

The Tiger of Southley Downs had come again. The candlelight was ineffective and dim, yet it showed the outline plain. Even then I tried to tell myself it was some mental fallacy, a mirage or delusion that could not possibly be true. I tried to say it was the effect of light and shadow; but the lie died before it came to my thought. It wasn't any use to try to deny the reality of the thing. There was the tawny hide, darkened, of course, by the shadow, the low-hung head, the great black stripes. The details were obscured; but my eyes didn't need them to recognize the creature. It seemed to be lying close to the floor, in the position a tiger takes just before it springs.

And I couldn't say it wasn't true. It would not have been so convincing if Vilas had not seen it, too. And I knew by the suppressed gasp of the great detective beside me that his eyes were also resting on the thing. I think that he started to whisper some messages of wonder. But I didn't hear him. All I heard was Vilas's scream.

He backed up against the wall, his fingers at his throat. There was no record left in my brain of the sounds he made and the words he said. Ahmad Das had returned, just as he had promised, to get the answer to his questions. The transformation was complete—the tiger soul at last in its own body. And Vilas was ready to answer.

"I'll tell you, Ahmad," he cried. "I'll tell you all. I'm Strumburg, just as you said, and a fugitive from justice, too. And I haven't anything against Southley. Even my father couldn't have proved his claim in a test, and he's dead. Let me go, Ahmad! Don't raise your talons against me."

The wild flow of words died away, and for an instant the form in the shadow halted. Then it moved slowly forward again.

"I tell you I'll go away, and never return again. We never had any real proofs. Ahmad! Let me go!"

And at that instant I felt Alexander's breath against my ear. "You heard, didn't you, Long?" he whispered.

"Yes—"

"Then the work's done."

I felt the stir as his arm reached up to an electric switch on the wall. He pressed it. Unknown to me, the wrecked lighting plant had been repaired. All the great chandeliers of the library flashed on at once.

The first impression was blindness. But as my eyes became adjusted to the sudden glare, I knew at least part of the truth at last. The form of the tiger had been most real and convincing at the edge of the dim and ineffective candlelight. But it was no more terrible than the counterfeit giraffes that the clowns parade in a circus ring, when the glare from the chandeliers came down. Before us, stripped of all delusion, Ahmad Das rested on his hand and feet on the floor. He held his body low, his legs almost straight, to give the effect of length. Over him, in a rather ingenious way, was thrown a great, tawny tiger skin. The four legs were fastened with some simple device to his ankles and wrists, and the great head, filled out with some light substance, rested on his.

I leaped and seized Alexander's shoulders.

"Good Heavens!" I yelled in his ear. "That's only part of it. That insane hoax couldn't have broken Hayward's neck!"

But Alexander wriggled out of my grasp.

"Of course it didn't break Hayward's neck," he said. "The real murderer of Hayward slipped one over on us—improvised some business that wasn't written in the play. I've got the real murderer of Hayward, dead, down in the bolt."

CHAPTER XXII.

ALIAS VILAS HAYWARD.

ALEXANDER PIERCE spent most of the rest of the evening answering questions. There were more things to find out than ever I thought I could possibly learn.

First he took us down to the boat beside the water, and lifted the tarpaulin that covered the thing in the bottom. A dead animal lay therein—a creature large as the largest hound, yellow, with spots of black. It was a powerful animal, long-clawed and white-fanged; and my breath stopped at the sight of it.

"A tiger?" I demanded.

"Tiger, nothing!" Alexander answered. "You ought to be enough of a naturalist to know that a tiger has stripes. This beast has spots. He weighs two hundred pounds, and a tiger twice as much. Besides, you don't find tigers in Southern Florida. It's plain to me, old Doc Long, that you don't know the history of Florida very well."

"Evidently I don't. I don't remember reading about such a creature as this—"

"Please speak respectfully of him. I'd have much preferred to have left him alive, but we'll need him for proof of that wild story we have to tell the coroner's jury tomorrow afternoon. If you remember, there was a time when Southern Florida was still the home of the jaguars—the greatest of American felines."

I remembered that I had heard something about it.

"Most of them were exterminated a good many years ago. You can still find 'em in a few remote regions in Southern Texas. I supposed myself that they were all gone here—even in such a wild part of the State as this. Long, you see here what is probably the last of the Florida jaguars—a creature as heavy as a leopard, and one of the strongest jawed and shouldered felines in the world.

"And since you won't rest till I tell you the rest of it, I might as well say that this big cat was the base on which Ahmad and Southley worked out their plot. They knew about this jaguar. When the niggers came in with their stories, they guessed, long ago. The elder Southley is something of a naturalist. Of course Ernest didn't hear about it, neither did Josephine—they were away at school. When they came back, a few weeks ago, things had gone so far already, the situation was so desperate, they were afraid to trust their secret even to them. Neither of 'em knew before last night, when

I advised telling them. The others were afraid they'd give sign—and besides, their own terror worked subconsciously on the Haywards, and added to the effect.

"You ask why they didn't enlighten the colored men two years before. The reason they didn't was just that they knew one of them would hunt him down and kill him—and Southley thought that a wild jaguar on his estate was a decided asset. Besides—he probably enjoyed the fun of the thing. Southley has quite a good sense of humor, Long, if you give him a chance to get it out. The poor old man hasn't had much chance lately.

"Well, when Hayward and his son bore down upon them here—after tracing them all the way from England—Southley and Ahmad saw a chance to take advantage of this big, tawny creature in the swamp. I suppose you know by now what the Haywards were."

"Blackmailers, of course," I answered.

Alexander gritted his teeth.

"You've taken plenty long to guess it, but you're right at last. Not just good, honest blackmailers such as a few times I've run to earth. But blood-sucking, damnable blackmailers, rotten as the driftwood in this swamp. Oh, it did me good to see that Vilas writhe to-night. And I'm shedding no tears over that broken neck on the hill two nights ago.

"Their real name is Strumburg. They are crooks themselves. The elder Strumburg was a confederate in crime in Southley's own youth. I use the word guardedly, Long, and I think it is true. I haven't any doubt but that Southley's early life wouldn't bear investigation. But that doesn't matter now. It's a joy, my boy, to come to the aid of one who has come to his own aid. Southley rose above that other life. He made a fortune in African mines by his own courage and perseverance. And never could I find dearer service than working to keep him out of the mire instead of tearing him back to his prison.

"I think that he escaped after a particularly reckless crime. It wasn't a crime that benefitted him financially, he says; but yet the hue and cry that was raised scared him from his criminal ways. A man was

shot, and though there were extenuating circumstances, he certainly would have gone to prison for twenty years at least, according to the way men were sentenced in those days. First he went to India and Africa, and made his fortune. Then he came to America, as Andrew Lasson. And all the time he lived in deadly fear that the long arm of the British law would reach out for him. He bought this wild plantation, hidden away in the wildest part of Florida. He married, and sent his boy and girl off to school, and made a real gentleman out of his son, and a real woman of his girl. And he thought he was safe.

"But the elder Strumburg found him out. He adopted the name of Roderick, and sent out inquiries for this Andrew Lasson. He offered a huge reward to be paid a year after we found him, and of course Lasson—or Southley as we will call him now—was to pay the reward. He came here at last, with his vicious son, and the work of blackmail began. They told old Southley—in the gray twilight of his days—what to expect in case he didn't come through with their demands.

"They said they had proofs that would put him back in prison. The terror of his long years came back as never before, and he didn't have the strength and judgment to fight it any longer. Old age was upon him. He gave way, again and again. And even to-day he wouldn't be free if it hadn't been for the real hero of Southley Downs—his servant, Ahmad Das.

"Ahmad Das is a mystic. Long, you're a doctor, and you don't believe in prenatal influence. You say it's all bunk. Yet it is true that Ahmad Das's mother was attacked by a tiger, that the creature died when Ahmad Das was born—and it is true that Ahmad has the most remarkable, natural, catlike grace of any man I ever saw? Of course he just pretended the rest—his propensities toward creeping around on his hands and knees. It all lent toward the effect. He's a mystic, I tell you—perhaps a believer in the theory of reincarnation of souls; and that dark, oriental mind of his conceived of an idea that I don't think most Anglo-Saxons would have ever thought of.

"He knew he couldn't kill the Haywards.

That was murder, and would defeat their own ends in that it might draw attention to the past life of Southley. He knew that Southley couldn't satiate their rapacious appetites. They would cling and suck till the last cent was gone. Southley bought those clothes—paid for their cars. Other things were planned for this winter. So Ahmad Das conceived of the desperate scheme of scaring the Strumburgs—or the Haywards, as they called themselves—from the estate by means of the tiger legend.

"You must understand that the Haywards never admitted that they were really the Strumburgs. They pretended they were righteous citizens who had found out about Southley's youth. That's why I tell you they were worse than ordinary blackmailers. I hated them worse. If they had admitted they were the Strumburgs, that was a telling card against them. The younger Strumburg is wanted on a serious charge himself. Southley rather hoped that the Strumburgs really had no proofs that they could connect this influential Southern planter with the young crook of forty-five years before, but he was afraid to put the matter to the test. So part of the scheme was to scare a confession out of them that they really were the Strumburgs, and that they really had no proofs to convict Southley.

"Ahmad Das had all the material in the world to work with. He knew it when he thought out the plan. This jaguar—a tawny streak in the jungle, and leaving its tracks in the mud—was of course his greatest card. His own natural feline grace and Hayward's naturally superstitious nature were cards, too. Wicked men usually are superstitious. Of course Ahmad couldn't get the jaguar into the house; but it was a simple matter to rig up that tiger skin. Every day he put a piece of meat out on a certain flat rock on the hillside. It wasn't human blood and flesh you saw there. It was good red beef; and Ahmad Das got blood stains on his shirt carrying it down there. And it wasn't any time at all until they got that big cat so that he stayed around the jungle at the base of the hill. The inside work couldn't be done in the bright light, so it was necessary to pretend that the lighting plant was broken. The

faint light of candles gave just the proper atmosphere.

"I'm crazy about the whole scheme, Long. It worked out to perfection except for one thing. Nobody had counted on the jaguar killing Hayward.

"A jaguar is a coward, you know, Long. But you're enough of a hunter to know that most of the carnivorous animals will fight like hell if they think their retreat is cut off. A bear will, and so will a cougar. This jaguar was up to the rock getting his meat when the levee began to break. His first instinct was to cross the isthmus before it was inundated. And the elder Hayward, whom Ahmad Das had frightened out of the house with the tiger skin, stood in the way.

"That was all there was to it. He struck as he dashed by, the full force of that mighty blow. The neck was broken like a match.

"But that didn't settle his son, Vilas Hayward. Vilas was younger, didn't have such a memory of crime, and was harder to scare. He was to remain and do the bleeding, and send plenty of money to his father. Since his father was dead he intended to remain, anyway. The fact of the death, and Freeman scurrying around trying to convict Ahmad, made it necessary that we hurry matters. Thus we arranged the scene in the library to-night, and thus its happy conclusion."

"But why," I demanded, "did you come in disguise?"

"I told you one reason. Another was that Vilas Hayward—alias Strumburg and Roderick—had applied in person to me at a certain detective agency with which I was connected. To have him recognize me here and know that I recognized him, would have complicated matters."

"And I suppose the lighting plant was in the best of condition all the time?"

"Long, you're really growing astute, of course, and you gave me a good scare when you were tinkering at it. You'd found out the truth in a minute. I had only to connect a wire, and the charged batteries shot their juice. Of course they will be exhausted soon, but the generator is ready to go. And you scared me even worse down by the swamp the day you said you were going

back with the body of Hayward. I was simply dumfounded—but when I saw how Miss Southley jumped into the breach I knew we were making a mistake not to take her into our confidence. Of course she guessed the blackmail before that, but she didn't know anything of Ahmad's plot."

"But why did she want me to stay?" I demanded.

Alexander looked at me with absolute disgust. "Why did she? That's the question," he muttered. "I can't possibly see myself."

I leaped hurriedly to another question. "And what were you doing with that shirt—and the beef blood?"

"Simply making the necessary tests—so to prove my story to the jury to-morrow. If I hadn't Freeman would have had poor Ahmad—the most faithful soul in the world—convicted and hung for murder by now—mentally, at least."

"And, lastly, how did you come to be involved in this affair at all? Did you come just because I sent for you?"

"I'm a private detective, Long," was his quiet answer. "I don't work for the State, although the State employs me sometimes. Southley himself wrote for me to come—to help him out. I told him I couldn't at first—that was some weeks ago—but I knew a young man that would be the greatest assistance to him in the hour of need. That young man had been in two or three bad messes before—the affair at Wildmarsh, and the story of the cobra curse, and the Mole. Southley had met the young man in a visit in Tampa, and he liked him. So the next day this young chappie—and what a bone-head he has been—got a letter from Southley asking him down for a week's shooting, fishing, and rest. He was a doctor, and his name was Long."

"Good Lord!" I exploded, unbelieving. "And what a mess this same Long has made of it."

"Beautiful, isn't it? But terribly energetic. And I hope you don't regret it, do you?"

"Regret it! If I can just make a certain person forget some of the vicious things I said—"

"They forget rather easily, doc, old boy,"

Alexander reassured me kindly. "It's the sweetness of their natures. And, Long, I've been rejoicing, too. There was the fun of watching Freeman when he discovered the hole in the shirt, and the joy of being chased over the hillside, and the real delight in paying back that Vilas wretch some of the fear he had given his aged host. But most of all—I never had a more delightful moment in my life than the one I had at the end of the tiger trail—on that island in the swamp where I came on that jaguar this afternoon. He charged, you know, and for a full minute I thought we'd come to blows!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

SECRET OF THE MARSH.

VILAS left on the night train. He packed his bag in silence, and was rowed over to the railroad track whence he could go to the station. He was a broken and beaten man; and it would be a long time before the horror that had been written on his face would quite fade away.

"Remember, we know quite a bit about you, Strumburg," Alexander told him. "We never want to see you in Florida again."

Strumburg promised that we never would. And soon the shadows of the jungle closed behind him. And after a while I congratulated Ahmad in the hall.

He was dark and impassive as ever; but I thought that a joyous sparkle had come into his mysterious eyes. Here was the real hero of Southley Downs! It had been his cunning, his skill, all the way through. He had said just the right thing to bring out a confession. And it was all for the man and master that he loved—the gray and venerable owner of Southley Downs. It was a rare lesson in fidelity.

"But how did you run so fast in the awkward thing?" I asked him, remembering the night I had chased him in the hall.

"Oh, I got on my feet, as always. I didn't wear any shoes, and I could run swiftly, *sahib*. And I went down again when I saw I would have to pass the lighted door."

When midnight hung still and mysterious over the water world, Josephine and I found ourselves alone on the great veranda.

"Let's walk down to the water's edge," she suggested. "It's drying up so quickly. It will be gone in a few days more."

"And I will be gone, too," I told her.

She walked in front of me, down the narrow path. And I was struggling for words that wouldn't come. The moon had risen at last and was a glory on her face.

"Did you know, Miss Southley, that Alexander was responsible for my invitation here?" I asked her at last.

She did not even turn her head. "I found it out to-night."

"Do you see what that means? That I was sent here to serve. And all I did was make mistakes."

We were at the water's edge at last, and she stopped beside me. Together we looked at the bright path that the moon made.

"They started on the day we met—when I let you go without providing means of ever seeing you again," I went on. "Fate protected me then. I wonder if I can ask it to protect me now—after all the other mistakes I've made. And the worst of them all—the ones that hurt most—are the things that I said and thought of you."

Her voice was scarcely more than a whisper when she answered me.

"They hurt me, too."

"They showed me up as the poorer clay," I told her sadly. "They exposed me—a doubting and suspicious man, and a blind man, too. One who is unable to believe in his finer instincts. Of course, I see now why you brought the pistol in your vanity bag. Tell me, Josephine! It was for no other reason than to protect yourself from Vilas Hayward, if worse came to worst?"

"I don't believe you are done doubting yet, or you wouldn't ask," she said. "That was just part of the reason, Dr. Long. The other was that I was so afraid—so afraid, all the time."

"You were with him always as part of the blackmail your father paid. You were part of the price of silence, and you submitted because you realized something of the power that the Haywards held over your

father. What your father told the detective—that you were to be Vilas's wife—was from compulsion, not from choice."

She nodded.

"And for the same reason you couldn't come to my defense that night in the den—when I had struck Vilas. And the reason that you told the detective of my quarrel with Hayward that day as I was leaving was not that you were afraid Vilas would be implicated, but why was it, Josephine?"

"I don't think you should ask me that. You've thought ill of me—so many times. The reason was—"

"Yes."

"That I wanted you to stay, Dr. Long!"

We were silent a long time. And all the while I was searching about in a mind suddenly gone empty for the words I wanted to say. They simply wouldn't come.

And then I became aware of something rapturous past words to tell. Something was stealing along my arm, so light that I could hardly feel it through my coat sleeve, and finally it nestled at the hollow of my elbow. And then I found myself whirling, and speaking breathless words.

"You'll forgive me, Josephine—all those things I said—and did?" I pleaded. "Oh, sweetheart—"

And no mortal eyes could believe the change in her that came when I spoke these words. It was one of the miracles of these latter days. At first she simply waited—as if for me to continue. And then, after a while, she made me an answer. Part of it was just words. Part was the look that the moonlight showed on her face. But what was by a thousand times the biggest part, the part no human being could have been hopeful enough to believe, was a thing that her arms did. And then—

What happened then is a secret between us and the marshes; and the marshes are famous for not telling their secrets. One of their secrets is a ring that Vilas had given Josephine; and it lies in the mud of their bottom to-day. After a while a great owl hooted and called from the island, hoping to repeat his triumph of a few nights before. But Josephine turned her face just long enough to laugh at him.

(The end.)

Infielder Jekyll and Outfielder Hyde



by Frank T. Blair

THE other day a guy backs me into a corner of an eating *château* and says he's sleuthed a wishbone outa a piece of chicken he's been toying with, and he craves to know if I'll engage in a pulling contest to find out will our wishes come true or reverse English.

"Sure," I says, seizing a hunch by the forelock, and I gets down a mental resolve that nothing would please me more than to wake up some morning and find that one of the Bronco scouts had shipped me a real first-baseman.

"All set!" yodels the eating-house chap, and I crosses a coupla fingers on the left hand, takes this wishbone firmly between the thumb and forefinger of the right mitt, and splits off the lion share of the spoil. That's mebbe the reason old Carl Quimby got busy and sent this fellow Clarence Hyde to the Broncos. You ain't heard about it? Well, leave me have plenty of space and I'll hand you the scenario.

The season's a coupla months into history and the Broncos are traveling along in the league like an auto that's busted a steering-gear, tossed off a tire and run outa gas. We slip from second to fourth place in jig time, and me being the manager, I'm losing plenty of sleep trying to check the Broncos' slide down the ladder.

These Broncos get so they're using the

bats only as wands to disturb the ozone, the fielders handle the ball like they're wearing boxing-gloves, and the pitchers are wilder than an untamed citizen from Borneo. And on top of that I lose my regular first sacker, Ham Coveney, by the appendix route, him being forced to book a few games on the hospital circuit.

Well, the Bronco scouts romp through the timber and try to uncover a bird for the first bag, but there's nothing doing until Quimby picks up this Clarence Hyde in the Western. Quimby's wire beats the rookie to headquarters by a coupla days and it chirps:

BOUGHT CLARENCE HYDE, WICHITA FIRST-BASEMAN. GOOD HITTER. CLEVER FIELDER. AM SENDING HIM AT ONCE.

"Fine," thinks I, and I figger I'll jam the Wichita wonder into the line-up as soon as he reports, on account of the chap that's trying to play the sack being afflicted with sleeping sickness or something.

Believe me, this lad Hyde comes in like a March blizzard. I'm dropping into the clubhouse to change into my unie before a game and I bumps right into a man-size scrap that's under way. Here's Cotton Evarts, my third-sacker, exchanging wallops with a strange young man—a tall, gloomy-

looking citizen that's wearing his hair over the ears and using an 1842 model suit, which don't fit him in no place you can mention.

While I'm debating if I'll butt in and call the affair a draw, the rangy newcomer lashes out with a stiff right and kicks a goal on Cotton's jaw. Cotton goes to dreamland and the scrappy youth turns to the other Broncos that are assembled at the ringside.

"Who's next?" he snaps, like cold steel, sweeping the bunch with crackling black eyes. "The line forms at the right."

"Listen!" I butts in. "What d'yuh mean by starting a rough-house around here? What d'yuh want, anyhow?"

At that the husky stranger clouds up again and it looks like I'm due to take Cotton's place in the ring, and on account of me being no Markis of Pillsbury expert I hastens to inform the junior Dempsey that I'm the Bronco manager and what can I do for him.

"Huh!" grunts this lad, sourlike. "I been looking for you. I come in here asking for the manager and these guys start to kid me. Wanta know where I gets the Fifth Avenoo togs. Wanta know am I just in from Kalamazoo and where did I go after seeing the barber. This bird"—the clubhouse champ indicates the reclining Cotton—"this bird gets rougher than the others, and I takes time out to polish his manners."

"Forget it," I responds; "you are now among friends. What can I do for you?"

"I'm Clarence Hyde, from Wichita."

"Hyde?" I says, and then I remember that's the name of the kid that Quimby dug up in the Western. "So you're the new first-sacker, eh?"

"First-sacker nothing!" hollers Hyde. "I'm an outfielder."

"But—but," I begins, "my scout signed you as an infielder—a first-baseman."

"Your scout musta been cuckoo. Look here, I know where I been playing and nobody can tell me different. Get me? I'm an outfielder."

Well, here's a fine panful of fish. A scrappy rookie that's signed as an infielder comes breezing in, nearly ruins my third-

baseman, and then tells me he's nothing less than an outfielder. Also, this person from Wichita is the first newcomer I'd lamped in a flock of years that acted like he didn't care a whoop whether he made the grade or grabbed a return ticket to the sticks. First off, I'm inclined to head the boy for Wichita, pronto, because I'm toting plenty of outfielders, even if they ain't hammering down no fences. But there's something about this guy's appearance, even in his street togs, that tells me he's a ball-player. He's got a powerful pair of shoulders, and I've a hunch he knows how to put 'em behind his swing at the ball.

"Hop into a unie," I tells Hyde finally. "I got an army of gents that are drawing pay as outfielders, but I'll give you a chance."

Hyde slips me a vinegary look. "Suit yourself," he mutters; "you're running the show."

Naturally, I'm anxious to get the real dope on this mix-up about the gloomy Mr. Hyde, so before we trot out for the first game with the league-leading Panthers I fires a wire at Carl Quimby. I figger, you see, that Carl's either been scouting with a bottle of hooch in one hand, or else this lad Hyde is a bit light in the upper story.

Out there warming up, Hyde looks the part of a regular ball-player, so I sends him up to crack a few in batting practise. And, boy, I'm telling you he looks good up there at the register. Lefty Renfer is feeding 'em up to the batters, and I tells him to bear down and give this new bird the whole repertoire, as they remark in the theaters.

"Watch me," boasts Lefty, "this pugilist won't even grab a foul." Lefty, you know, is one of these non-shrinking violets you meet up with occasional on a ball club.

Lefty sends up a fast one which must of forgot to hop; anyhow, the stalwart Hyde brings his old war-club around in a sweeping swing and parks the apple over the left field fence.

"Accidents will happen," jeers Lefty, crestfallen.

"Sure," Hyde flashes back, "or they wouldn't be calling you a pitcher. Why, you big—"

"Wait," I butts in, scenting another mix-up unless I can curb the hot-headed Hyde. "Cut it out, you two. Understand? No more rough stuff!"

"Get a pitcher in there," Hyde mutters as a parting shot, "this guy's so easy it ain't even good practise hitting against him."

Lefty must of been boiling by this time. Anyhow, he dishes up his pet curve, and Hyde nails it for a sizzler through short, a clean base hit, even if a Maranville had been playing the position. As for myself, by the time the boys are through clubbing I'm voting that this Wichita gent is one of those birds you read about, but don't often uncover: a natural batter. However, Hyde also gives evidence that he won't be no peacemaker on the club, and a ball team that ain't got harmony is sure to be missing on a flock of cylinders. Hyde's gotta be toned down, I figger, or I'll be piloting a string of fighters, instead of a drove of ball-players.

Well, I leave Hyde sit on the bench that first day, but when the Broncos get the tying and winning runs on the paths in the ninth I sends the rookie up to bat for the pitcher. Hyde cracks a double into left, and two pals romp across with the runs that give us the ball game. And right there I determines I'll give this lad a real tryout in spite of his quarrelsome disposition.

That night at the hotel I'm handed a wire from Carl Quimby, the scouting demon. It's dated from Omaha and goes like this:

Sure Hyde's a first-baseman. Was playing first base when I bought him. If he says he's not an infielder he's crazy.

That telegram ties me into a mental knot and I'm losing more sleep trying to dope things out.

Next day in the second scrap of the Panther series I'm aiming to find out once and for all if Hyde's an outfielder. So I tells him to play in left field.

Well, the game hasn't reached the half-way mark before I perceives that this youth ain't no Speaker, or nothing like that, though he's doing about as well as Hank Rudolph, who's been playing the position.

Besides, Hyde helps himself to a coupla base knocks right off the reel, while Hank is in a hitting slump so deep it 'd take a derrick to lift him into his normal stride. Wherefore, I figger I'll keep Hyde out there in left for a while on account of his hitting.

This scrappy youngster continues his good work at bat in the next few games and inside of a week I'm labeling him my regular left-fielder until Hank Rudolph comes outa his slump. Hyde's hitting seems to have livened up the rest of the Broncos, too, and we set the fastest pace of the season. If I can keep the gang traveling along like that it's a cinch we'll soon overhaul the pace-setting Panthers.

There's only one fly in the porridge, which same is that none of the Bronco scouts have been able to dig up a first-baseman, and we're dropping a few tight games because Moose Davis, who succeeded Ham Coveney on the bag, don't come close to being an honest-to-goodness major league first-sacker.

The Bronco owners take the lid off the old bank-roll and bid high for a coupla first-basemen on other major league clubs, but there's nothing doing. However, even with Moose going like a water-logged craft in a choppy sea, I'm thinking we'll give these Panthers a chase for the old flag.

And then this Hyde spills the beans.

II.

WE'RE right in the middle of a series with the Eagles, and we're needing every game to keep on the heels of the Panthers. The boys come hustling into the clubhouse, one by one, before the third game of the series, and I see they're in the right kind of mood: scrappy and earnest, eager to get out there on the field and maul these Eagles so the Broncos will hop into the lead if the Panthers falter.

Well, I'm crowding into my unie when Hyde comes strolling in, smiling like he's hauled in a jackpot or something.

"Howdy, gang," he greets the bunch, nodding good-natured to the rest of the crowd.

I nearly falls off my chair, on account of this being the first time I've seen this

citizen pull a smile; and, besides, he ain't been in the habit of speaking until he's spoken to, and mebbe not even then.

Right away Hyde drifts into a bit of a popular song, and I thinks Cotton Evarts is going to faint. Ever since Hyde slammed Cotton for a homer the third-sacker has voted that this Wichita person is the world's champion crab. Fact is, none of the Broncos had ever heard Hyde uncover anything that resembles sunshine, yet here he is, whistling and humming like he ain't got a care in the world.

"Somebody die and leave you a million?" says Moose Davis, taking his life in his hands. "Why the song-bird idea?"

"Does a guy good to sing," chirps Hyde. "I usta be a pretty fair tenor."

"You ain't no more," Moose comes back, and I figgered he'd look for a soft spot to land. As usual, I'm doping things wrong.

"You don't care for the voice, eh?" says Hyde, cheerful. "Mebbe I'm a little outa practise at that." And he goes on dressing and singing.

Believe me, I'm puzzled by this new attitude in Hyde, but I'm some pleased, too, because this youngster had been a little too scrappy, even for the Broncos. It 'll do him good, I figger, to loosen up and act more like a regular human being.

Well, we hop through batting practise, and when the boys trot out onto the field for a fielding workout I'm handed my second knockout of the afternoon. For Hyde, instead of going out to his place in left, grabs a first-sacker's mitt and walks out to Moose Davis's stamping-grounds.

It don't take me long to navigate from the bench to first base.

"What's the big idea?" I asks Hyde. "Can this monkey business and hop out into left."

Hyde looks at me in blank surprise. "Why, what's wrong?" he says. "Ain't I playing first to-day?"

I swallows hard a coupla times when I'm handed that package. "As usual," I sputters, "you poor fish, didn't you tell me you wasn't no infielder? Didn't you say you was an outfielder? Answer me that."

"Beg pardon," Hyde comes back, polite, "I've always played first base. You musta

made a mistake about me playing in the outfield. Honest, boss, I'd be a frost out there in left field."

"Listen!" I hollers, figgering I'll have it out with this queer bird once and for all, "you say you're a first-sacker, eh? All right, you're playing the bag to-day, and you'll do it shipshape or you're grabbing a rattler to-night for the sticks. Get me?"

"Fair enough," says Hyde. "Le's go."

Well, I gotta admit that Hyde looks like the goods in practise at the bag and the game ain't gone more than to the half-way mark before I'm voting that there's no chance for this lad to slip back to the minors as long as he's playing that kind of ball around the old hassock. Hyde handles himself like he's played the position all his life, digging the ball outa the dirt and spearing it outa the air like a second Stuffey McInnis. And on top of that he's walloping the sphere as hard as ever. Ticked? Say, I'm some pleased, because with Hyde plugging that first base hole we've got a sweet infield.

"Moose," I says as the big fellow slides along next to me on the bench, "looks like you've lost a regular job. This Hyde's a real guy out there on the bag."

Moose scowls. "Huh, that bird's cuckoo! How'd you know he won't show up to-morrow and tell you he's an outfielder and ain't never seen a first-baseman's mitt?"

That remark by Moose sets me thinking. Of course, now that I see Hyde's got the goods on first base, I want him to play the sack regular, on account of me having plenty of outfielders, but nobody for the initial crag except Moose. But what if this youngster from Wichita pulls another of his crazy switches and wants to go back to outfielding? And then I gets an idea. I'll put the whole thing up to old Doc Graney, the club physician. Mebbe the doc can tell me what's ailing Hyde and slip me the proper cure.

Accordingly, I'm hunting up the doc that evening and telling him about Hyde's case, and how the kid reports as a gloomy, scrapping outfielder and then gets his disposition all ironed out nice when he hops to the infield job.

"Mighty interesting case," muses the doc when I've wound up. "Know anything about dual personality?"

"Come again," I remarks.

Doc laughs. "It's like this: offhand, I'd say that Hyde has what we call double consciousness, or dual personality. In one personality he's the crabbed, vinegary outfielder; in the other, he's the genial, smiling infelder, slow to anger. And in both personalities he evidently retains his skill at bat."

"Yeah, the kid sure can wallop the old apple."

"Odd, too, that the boy's name is Hyde," the doc goes on, "that makes it something like a Jekyll and Hyde situation."

"Jekyll?" I asks. "What club's he with?"

"Character in a book," says doc, grinning. "Only Stevenson, who wrote the story, made his Mr. Hyde actually different physically, as well as mentally, from Hyde's other personality, as represented by Dr. Jekyll. There's been cases, too, in which the subject had three or more distinct personalities. Multiple personality, we call it."

"I'll pass on this bird Jekyll, doc," I says, "but what I wanta know is, can't you do something to keep Hyde from going back into this outfielding frame of mind? I need that guy on first."

"Job for a specialist, I'm afraid. It's out of my line. What you'd better do is to consult a psychoanalyst. He might be able to cure the player."

"Me for one of these psycho citizens," I tells doc. "If I don't have Hyde out there on the sack for the rest of the season we can kiss our pennant chances good-by."

III.

WELL, Doc Graney puts me on the trail of one of the psycho birds and I'm explaining Hyde's case to this guy that specializes in taking trial balances of a fellow's brain. I tells the doc that I'll steer Hyde over to his place for treatment, giving the kid a stall about how the club's sending all the players to a specialist to make sure they're fit for the final days of the race.

"The big idea, doc," I tells him, "is to

keep this lad in a first-basing personality for the rest of his natural life. He's a wiz on the sack, but he's only a fair outfielder."

"Send him over," advises the psycho king; "I'll see what I can do for him."

And then the plot thickens, as they say in the novels. Yeah, you guessed it. Hyde does another mental flip-flop before I can round him up and broach the subject of the psycho expert, and when I finally corals Hyde he's once more thinking he's nothing less than an outfielder.

"What d'yuh mean?" he hollers. "I don't need no doctor—say, are yuh trying to kid me?"

"Naw," I says, stalling, because I see I've slipped a coupla cogs. You see, I'd plumb forgot that in this outfielding personality Hyde won't be liable to fall in with any suggestion like this one about paying a visit to the doctor. And it's going to be some job, I perceives, to steer this quarrelsome citizen over to the psycho sawbones.

Swinging into verbal high gear I tickles the parts of speech continuous for a coupla minutes, but I ain't able to convince this Hyde that he oughta date himself with the doc. And all the time I can see our pennant chances going blooie unless I can get Hyde back into the first-basing idea in a hurry. We're running neck and neck with the Panthers, and it looks as if the flag may hinge on the final series of the year—which same is four games with these same Panthers right in our own stronghold. With Hyde playing his brilliant fielding game on the sack and hitting in his usual form, we gotta grand chance to upset the Panthers. With the kid outa the infield and Moose Davis in the line-up our chances are down below sea level.

I'm thinking along these lines as I'm telling you, but the arguments I'm offering to Hyde to show him he oughta date up with the specialist don't make no base hits with him.

"No!" he snaps finally. "I don't go to see no doctor unless I ain't feeling well. And if I felt any better I'd be wanting to lick three of these Bronco birds at once. That's how fit I am, see?"

We're in the clubhouse as Hyde pulls these lines, and outa the corner of one optic

I can see there's one Bronco that's, resenting Hyde's sneer. It's Moose Davis, who, packs a considerable scrappy disposition himself once he gets under way.

"Huh!" hollers Moose, directing his remarks at Hyde. "Lick three Broncs, eh? Listen, you four-flushing rookie, you can't whip me. Get that?"

Things start right away, believe me, Hyde's swinging for Moose's jaw as the big fellow winds up his challenge, and for five minutes the clubhouse is full of flying fists.

Hyde carries the fight to Moose with a snappy right as his ace in the hole. Moose's defense ain't much to brag about, and I figger he's going to dreamland pretty quick unless he can cash one of his haymaker swings. And that's just what happens.

Hyde, pressing in furiously, stings Moose with a right that lands on the big boy's left eye, putting the optic in the discard for the rest of the bout.

Moose lets out a roar like an enraged bull and rushes at Hyde, smashing and beating his way through the Wichita lad's defense by sheer weight of wallops. A fast-traveling left, aimed nowhere in particular, happens to crash into Hyde's jaw and he does a flip-flop to the floor. As Hyde goes down his head strikes on a window casing and he sprawls out, dead to the world.

"Get a doctor!" I hollers, and I hops over to where Hyde is stretched out, with blood flowing from a gash in his head.

Old Doc Graney happens to be in the stand, so he's giving Hyde the once over in jigtime.

"Pretty bad bump," is the doc's verdict, "but I guess he'll be all right in a few days."

Right here I gets an idea that I'm unloading on the doc.

"Doc," I says, calling him aside, "how'd it be to put this lad Hyde under the care of the psycho bird. The kid 'll need medical attention for a coupla days, and with him sorta subdued by this crack on the head, the doctor can analyze Hyde's case from this psycho angle." And I goes on to tell Doc Graney about how Hyde had just refused flatly to hop over for a session with the specialist.

Well, Doc Graney agrees that it won't

do no harm to leave the mind expert have a chance at Hyde, so I have the shaky Wichita kid taken over to his room; then I calls up the psycho king and tells him to have a look at the patient.

"And don't forget, doc," I says, "there's a nice fee waiting for you if you bring this bird back to normalcy, as they chirp in the newspapers."

"Leave it to me," answers the mental monarch. "Hyde will be back playing first base for you in a week."

For the next few days we're having our troubles keeping pace with the Panthers, but the boys uncover a hitting streak that evens up a bit for what we've lost in defense through having to put Moose back on first base. However, I'm counting on Hyde for the big series with the Panthers, now only a week away. And it looks as if the pennant and a chance at the world's series will hinge on that four-game collision.

In the meanwhile, I've given Hyde leave of absence and he's taking daily treatments at the hands of the psycho expert. And it don't take a blue-print for me to see that Hyde's no longer toting that crabby outfielding mood. His disposition seems all smoothed out and he's itching to get back into the game.

Well, we go into the Panther series tied with them birds for first place, and the pennant will go to the team that grabs the long end of the series. Day before the opening of the series I consults the doc and he says that Hyde is O. K., and seems perfectly normal. And the psycho expert is willing to wager that the kid's ready to hop in and play the first-base job right up to the handle. Wherefore, I tells Hyde to jump into a unie the next day, because we're sure going to need him to flop these Panthers.

"How're you feeling?" I asks Hyde when he comes into the clubhouse next day.

"Great!" he says. "I'm itching to get back in the game."

Hyde climbs into a unie in quick time and beats it out onto the field, and when I strolls out to toss a few I see that Hyde's corraled Buddy Casey, one of the Bronco catchers, and he's serving 'em up to Bud like he's trying to rival Grover Alexander.

We hit a few in practice, and then when it's time for the fielding workout I see that Hyde's again rounded up Bud and is working that person overtime, playing catch over by the bench.

"Hey, you," I hollers to Hyde, "you're playing first to-day."

"Firstfil" he says, puzzled like. "Why, I'm a pitcher; I can't play first."

That sends me down for the count of nine and I comes up, hanging on the ropes. What if this guy Hyde is one of them three-time personality birds that old Doc Graney was telling me about a short time

back—a regular multiple psycho citizen? But I makes up my mind that I'll overlook no bets.

"Bud," I says, addressing the catcher, "has this guy showed you anything that 'd make you think he's a pitcher?"

"Ain't got nothing but a glove and a wind-up," Bud assures me.

"You're fired!" I tells Hyde. "On your way before you're telling me you're the groundkeeper, or maybe the bat-boy. I know when I got enough."

The series? The pennant? Foolish questions. We lose 'em both.

F. Fibble's Day

by

Douglas Grahame



STEADILY and with a painstaking care that marked him apart from others of his kind, F. Fibble performed his humdrum but not unimportant duties upon a section of the ledgers of Franklyn Kellogg, Incorporated. He had worked in the same absorbed and diligent manner on all the days—morning and afternoon alike—of his four years' employment with the firm. But the forenoon in question is of importance to this tale because during it F. Fibble had been watched.

Not that he had escaped the calculating attention of his employers up to this time—far from it. Along with the other employees his efforts had been keenly if secretly inspected, weighed, tested, and with a very few others, grudgingly approved.

Always on time, sometimes ahead of it, he was quite as reliable as the office clock; the only difference between the two machines being that the human one didn't require winding up. Truly, he was well on his way to being a model employee. No grumblings, no guarded black looks, not even an utterance that he was being shabbily treated, *et cetera*; not so much as a hint for a raise from him in all the time that he had been on the Kellogg payroll.

The extraordinary thing about the morning in question, in so far as it concerned the conscientious Fibble, was that Mr. Franklyn Kellogg had paused for one whole minute before entering his sanctum, and watched the work-engrossed young man. More significant still, the gentleman had

musingly stroked his distinguished-looking Vandyke as he watched, which action he always engaged in whenever any matter of moment was under consideration. And the keenly observant office manager detected a twinkle of approval in the sharp, grayish eyes of the boss when he turned into his private office. Then the office manager took a long look at the remarkable young man for his own edification, and wondering what was afoot in the way of promotion or demotion, went on with his own duties. Needless to say, Fibble was as unaware of this out of the ordinary scrutiny as he was that it is necessary for the non affluent to stand patiently in line to procure world series tickets.

The morning advanced in its conventional and busy way, but a few minutes before noon the office manager was summoned into Mr. Kellogg's office, and a short while later emerged and made an announcement in his cold and offhand fashion. It was to the effect that as the day was the anniversary of the chief's appearance in the world, and at the same time the beginning of the baseball season, the employees could take the afternoon off with Mr. Kellogg's compliments. This intelligence was received with various degrees of glee by the Kellogg folk, and Fibble looked up from his work for just three seconds while the news was being imparted.

He finished the particular task that he was about, laid down his pen, and deliberately walked over to the desk of the office manager.

"Mr. Wilson," he said, in his clear, dry tones, "I fully appreciate Mr. Kellogg's kindness, but as I am not in the least interested in baseball, and as there are several matters that I would like to complete to-day, may I put in a few hours here this afternoon, please?"

The always-cool Mr. Wilson glanced up at his lank subordinate, and scorn flickered over his face as he said to himself, "What an incorrigible simp you are!" Then, with a bleak nod, he snapped:

"You may."

Fibble inclined his head with dignity and went back to work, while the other Kelloggites scurried about making ready

merrily to go forth to enjoy the unexpected half holiday.

It so happened, however, that when the request was being made and the consent was being granted, Mr. Kellogg was an auditor. He had just emerged from his office with some papers and overheard the interview. His pleasant face became even more pleasant, and there was no mistaking the expression of approval in his eyes when he looked at the scrawny back of Fibble. He paused for a moment in his progress to the section of the office to which he was bound; then, with the air of a man who has quite determined on a course of action, he resumed his way.

Hardly had Fibble traced two figures in his firm clear hand on the ledger than he was interrupted by a gushing, apologetic feminine voice, and looking up he saw fluffy little Miss Black, whose duty it was to take money to the bank, fidgeting beside him.

"Oh, pawdon me, Mr. Fibble," she was saying, "but being as you ah going to woik here a little while, would you please do me a favor? You see, I'm in a sort of hurry, and I wonder if you would please take this money—there's only fi' hundred dollars—and these here Liberty bonds, two o' em, hundreds, over to the bank for me, please? You will? Oh, thank you, I am much obliged to you, Mr. Fibble."

Fussily and gleefully she laid the pass-book, bulged with bills and the two bonds, on Fibble's desk, and with as much swish as her very tight and very short skirts would allow, ran off to join the others in the general and noisy exodus. In a very short while all the others had gone, up to and including Mr. Wilson and Mr. Kellogg, and Fibble was left alone with his work and his thoughts. He kept on steadily for upward of an hour; then he put down his pen, got down from the desk stool, brushed back his hair of indefinite color, and changed his alpaca working coat for his street one of seedy blue. Then donning his inexpensive derby, he was ready to go to lunch just as he had done every day at precisely one o'clock.

His bony hand encountered the valuables that had been intrusted to him, and true

to form he took them out of his pocket and placed them in a smaller safe that was used for the ledgers, petty cash and the like, and which he and one of the other book-keepers had authority over. This done, and the safe securely locked, Fibble made his way to the street.

Spring, romance, and youthful optimistic restlessness were in the clear and balmy air. Everybody seemed to be in holiday spirits, although it was an ordinary workaday for them; girls laughed and called to each other, men hummed and whistled, old folks smiled as they bustled along and inhaled deeply of the crisp April air. The very street, a commonplace section of the so-called roaring Forties, seemed to have a glamour about it. Even Fibble began to whistle, ever so softly, a snatch of a waltz that the three-piece orchestra in the moving-picture theater he attended twice a week, always played when the plot of the screen drama began to thicken.

The pleasant, subtle and intangible thing about the air had quite claimed F. Fibble for its own, for when he turned into the modest dairy lunch where he had partaken of his noontime snack every business day for four years, foreign and bewitching thoughts began to come into his very conventional mind. As he sipped his cocoa, he experienced a not unpleasant sense of mild rebellion at the sort of life he led. What he was and how he lived rose before him graphically, mockingly like a ghost, and he held the cup midway between the tile-covered table and his thin lips and examined the specter with wide and blinking eyes.

Cheerless boarding house, somewhere near the uppermost meandering of the Sixth Avenue "L"; eight thirty to five, at thirty dollars a week for his business day; a week at the very commercialized Long Island farmhouse in the summer; the same old stroll five nights a week, and the dime movie the other two—that was the story of his life since he had been in New York. And it was only just now that the drabness of it all had occurred to him.

Upon his arrival in the metropolis from a Kansas small town, following the departure for a better land of the spartan and

spinster aunt who had brought him up, there had existed in his breast a desire to become, perhaps a lieutenant of industry if not a captain, and failing that, he was confident that he would be at least a sergeant-major in the army of commerce in time to come. Instead, he was still a rear-rank private.

No, there was certainly nothing glorious about his work nor himself, he admitted with a wag of the head. F. Fibble, clerk, one of the countless millions. The only thing that had marked him apart, in the eyes of the world, had been his first name, Fauntleroy, and because of innumerable gibes inspired by the similarity of this name and that of a famed diminutive lordling, he had been compelled to reduce it to an inoffensive initial.

Still, his bleak existence had its bright side. For a little more than a year, now, he, F. Fibble, had been in love. Yes, he was completely enamored of Miss Agnes, a dainty, pleasant little person who came to the office every now and then to see her uncle, Mr. Kellogg. On one of the very rare occasions when he had looked up from his work, Fibble had seen her, and straightway he had become one more of the pretty lady's suitors. He knew full well the utter hopelessness of his passion, but this did not in the least keep down delightful fancies.

By the time he had finished his simple luncheon, Fibble had quite made up his mind to do whatever was possible to advance himself in the perplexing game called life. Just what he should or would do he had not the faintest idea, but the compelling urge to get ahead was upon him strongly as he made his way back to the deserted office. Arrived here, he went to the safe, opened it, and as a matter of course looked to see if the money and bonds were still there. They were, just as he had left them.

Admiringly he picked up one of the bonds and looked at it, duly impressed by the coloring, lettering, and figures. He had not bought any during the many drives, but he had done his bit in a smaller way by purchasing not a few War Savings stamps. As a matter of fact, these were the first bonds of the Great War that he

had ever seen, and he was quite awed by the inspection of them. He reverently laid them aside, and in the fashion of one who has the privilege of gazing upon some priceless volume, he gingerly opened the bank book, not to investigate its contents, however, but merely to peep at the roll of currency that it covered.

His mild eyes fairly popped out as he looked upon the sheaf of tens, twenties, fifties, and the two hundred-dollar bills. He had never seen so much money together in his life. He fingered it as though the crisp notes would burn his fingers, or at least give him a life-taking shock. He liked the feel of it; the touch, somehow or other, gave one a sense of confidence, and made the desire to hold up your head and stick out your chest very strong indeed. With a feel not unlike that of the maid who tries on milady's best bonnet, Fibble slipped the money, book and all, and the bonds, into the pockets of his shabby coat and was thrilled by the feel of the stuff in the dilapidated containers that had never held anything of greater value than a quarter.

There was a slight noise behind him, and he stopped breathing, and his heart almost discontinued functioning. In terror he looked up, and there, not six paces away, stood Mr. Kellogg, the office small beside the bulk of his figure, his eyes, cold and accusing, fixed on the miserable Fibble.

"You thief," he said in a strange hissing voice.

Fibble gasped and swallowed as though the air he breathed had suddenly been shut off. His long fingers instinctively entwined about the money and the bonds, as he drew up to his full height and in terrified misery faced his accuser.

"But, Mr. Kellogg, ah, I—" he gasped as though it was with his last breath.

"Never mind that—no excuses—I've caught you red handed and I'll see that you get your just deserts," snapped his employer in a voice that seemed strange and hard to Fibble. This the terror-stricken clerk attributed to rage. "Come on, hand over that stuff, now. Sing Sing will be your address for several years to come."

Sing Sing! A criminal! His life ruined! The shock of the prospect was like a dash

of ice water. Instantly Fibble was all action. He must escape. He cared not where, just as long as he got away from the grim predicament into which he had so innocently fallen. He bounded forward; Kellogg made a quick grab for his throat, but missed it by the smallest fraction of an inch. Fibble drove for his jaw, set so firm under the Vandyke, straight from the shoulder, and felt a savage thrill as the blow struck true and the bulky body quivered, tottered and fell with a crash. For a moment Fibble paused, grateful for the time that he had spent in the gymnasium of the Y. M. C. A., then elation gave way to horror, for the man's head had grazed a near-by desk, and he lay sprawled on the floor as though dead.

A murderer as well as a thief! He must get away; there wasn't a moment to lose. Panic was upon him, and he sprang for the door that was half open. But he had scarcely started when his progress was arrested by the appearance of two young men, roughly dressed, with caps over their eyes, somewhat under sized, but apparently gifted with herculean strength. Without warning, the pair flung themselves at Fibble. The terror-crazed clerk lunged out, knocked one of them aside, but immediately reeled from a crushing blow dealt him by the fellow's companion. He recovered himself, however, in an instant, and floored his opponent with a vicious body thrust. Then he bounded through the open door and raced down the corridor to the stairs.

Like mad he hurled himself down the steps—there weren't many, as the Kellogg offices were on the second floor—and in an incredibly short time reached the main hallway of the not very important building. For some reason or other the corridor was deserted, and of this he was glad, as he swung open the street door and projected himself out into the thoroughfare. But no sooner had he got out into the fresh air and sunshine than he suffered a shock that almost deprived him of his senses.

At the entrance to the building he came face to face with Mr. Kellogg, who stood stock still and regarded him with eyes wide with amazement. Fibble gave vent to a shriek of terror and doubled his speed in

the westward dash through the throng of people. His employer's ghost! He was being haunted! He must fly! And he did, as swiftly as his long legs would let him. Yet, no matter how fast he ran, he was conscious that the two undersized young men whom he had battled in the office were right at his heels. More disconcerting still, the hue and cry was in full swing; not fifty paces back was the van of the pursuers—men, women, and children, with screams of "Stop thief!"

As he dashed along, Fibble was glad of one thing. There was not a policeman in sight, and not the sound of one, either; by all appearances it was a holiday for the uniformed guardians of the law. Yet his sagging senses told him to beware of doorways, for it was quite possible that out of any of them a captor might bounce out and end his liberty. He was breathing hard and painfully; black and red specks floated before his eyes and queer music sounded in his ears, and when Seventh Avenue came into view he was staggering, and the two young men were almost abreast of him.

It looked as though hope was gone for him. The crowd was closing in fast, and surely in a second or two there would be policemen on hand; despair had almost completely settled upon him. Then an avenue of escape, a rather unusual and precarious one, presented itself, and without hesitation Fibble took advantage of it. A taxicab had drawn up at the curb, and the passenger, a girl of gaudy beauty, held open the door and beckoned to him. Fibble didn't take the time to be puzzled, but sprang into the car, and when the two men who had been chasing him clambered in, too, he realized that the beckoning was not for him, but for them. The car started up Seventh Avenue.

The woman regarded him with utter scorn, and the men began to pummel him. With the full force of his fast ebbing strength, he struck at them as the machine raced on at break-neck pace, and was filled with a wild satisfaction when one of them fell limp to the floor of the cab, and the other, badly damaged, declared an armistice.

But Fibble had little time for elation, for

the woman sprang at him, screeching and clawing. The car turned sharply westward; there was a thudding smash, the tinkle of broken glass, a hoarse, terrified yell from the chauffeur, a piercing scream from the woman, and Fibble found himself, his head whirling, sitting up on the cold sidewalk while the smashed cab hung upon a fire hydrant. Then all the people in the world seemed to gather around. Some one cried, "That's him!" and an army of very lifelike policemen closed in upon him. He was firmly taken in hand by one of the officers. He gave up all hope with a moan, the earth whirled around, and he fell backward into a great velvety void.

II.

IN the manner of a swimmer who comes to the surface after a long dive, Fibble raised his head and looked about him with vision-obscured eyes. Again he was the center of interest; he was in a place—yes, a court room that was packed with spectators, and they all looked upon him as though he was some strange and terrible animal that had been safely trapped and was now going to have a fitting punishment meted out to him for his horrid depredations. Timidly Fibble glanced up and cringed when he saw the stern old judge glowering down at him, and a beefy court attendant near by regarding him with a malicious look.

Wasn't it sufficient to deprive a poor devil of his liberty, let alone exhibiting him thus to the morbid gaze of the populace, and making a Roman holiday of him. Fibble took a furtive look at the spectators, and there, in the very first row, he saw Mr. Kellogg, and beside him Miss Agnes. Oh! This was too much! It was inhuman torture! As black as his crime was, he didn't deserve this torment! Exposed to the vulgar view and haunted by the ghost of his victim and the apparition of the lady of his fondest dreams! He covered his face in shame.

"I wish to point out to your honor that the crime of which these defendants are accused is especially atrocious because an automobile was employed in its commis-

sion," a harsh voice was saying, and looking through the fingers that covered his face, Fibble saw a stocky man whom he correctly surmised to be the assistant district attorney.

"And, because of the nature of the crime of which they are accused, I would respectfully ask, if it please your honor, that the amount of bail be placed at five thousand dollars for each of the defendants," the man declared.

As though some powerful restorative had been administered to him, Fibble half rose in his chair and took a curious interest in what was going on, with all his senses clearly functioning. Bail, in a case of this kind, first degree murder, and for *each* of the defendants? Why, the man must be raving mad. He was the only defendant—unless, perhaps, the others were being held for assault and battery; but this could hardly be. Then he looked to one side, and if he had been amazed at all that had occurred up to this point, what he saw made him marvel more than ever.

Lined up, with two policemen just back of them, were the two runtish youths who had given him so much trouble, and who looked quite the worse for wear, the painted and spangled damsel of the taxicab, who held herself most haughtily, and last but not least, a bulky fellow with half of a false Vandyke beard hanging to his far-from-honest face. Bewildered, Fibble looked about him, and instantly his impression of his environment changed. The judge was beaming down upon him quite benevolently, the court attendant grinned at him in highly friendly fashion, the spectators evidently regarded him as a hero.

As the defendants were led to the cells in default of bail, Mr. Kellogg and Miss Agnes met Fibble at the wicket that separated the spectators from the executive section of the police court. There was no mistaking their attitude toward him, and there was a murmuring sound of approval from the spectators as Fibble walked with his employer and his niece out of the court room.

"Well done, Fibble. I always had a good impression of you; but you have proven yourself to be an even better man

than I thought you to be," exclaimed Mr. Kellogg, grasping the astonished Fibble by the hand and shaking it heartily.

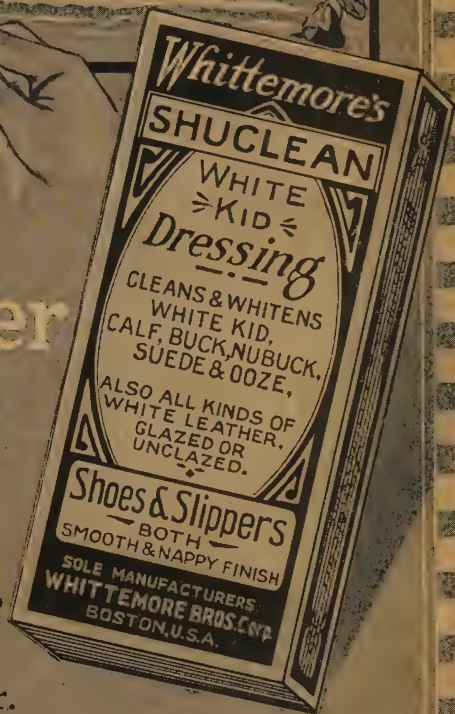
"Yes, you deserve great credit, my boy," broke in the assistant district attorney, smartly slapping him on the back. "You're the first man who has ever had the nerve to grapple with that gang and call their bluff. You should have a medal pinned on you for landing that band behind bars. The big fellow is one of the most dangerous crooks in the country, and the others are just about as bad although not so clever. The large bloke used the old-time nickname of Handsome Harry, but there sure isn't anything out of date about his methods. No, sir. His stunt is to get a line on the job he intends to pull, and at the first favorable opportunity he pulls it by impersonating the man he intends to rob. He's quite a gifted actor. That's what he did with you. He'd been given a tip about the money that is kept in the safe, and also about the half holiday. Then as bold as brass he passed himself off as Mr. Kellogg, and had it not been for you he would have got away with it fine. The only thing he missed fire on was the amount of the loot. He expected five thousand dollars, not five hundred—you should have heard him curse when I told him. Ha, ha!"

"It is quite evident that he had some informant inside our place," said Mr. Kellogg, "and I have more than an idea who it is. Fibble, I've been watching you for a long time. I had it in mind to make you my private secretary. In fact, I decided to drop in on you this afternoon and talk things over with you; but when I got to the building—Heavens! It was like a moving-picture scene in real life! Well, I find that you have a lot of nerve and know what to do in an emergency. Now, I want you to be my office manager. I am going to dismiss the present incumbent, that is, if he is brazen enough to put in an appearance after the events of this afternoon."

"Mr. Fibble, I think you are splendid," added Miss Agnes, pressing the astounded ex-bookkeeper's hand, and looking up at him with her fine gray eyes.



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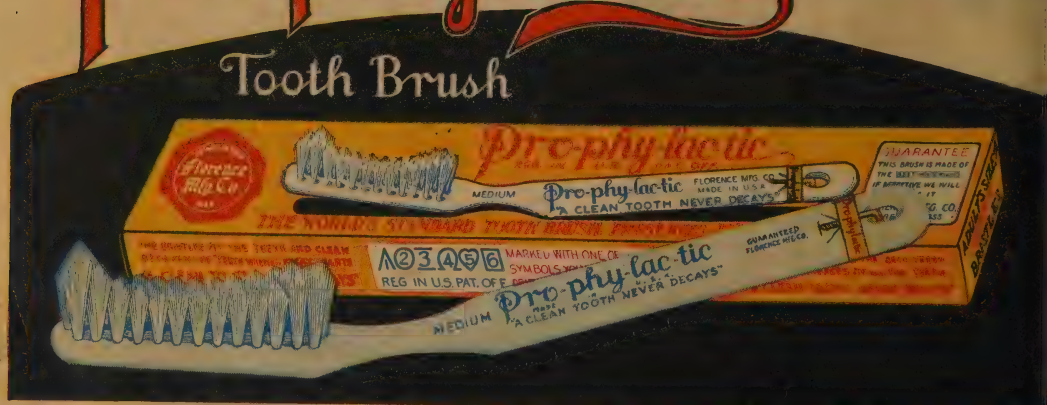
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLII

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NUMBER 3

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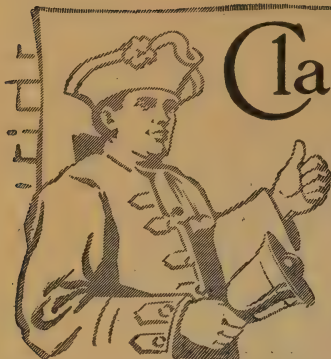
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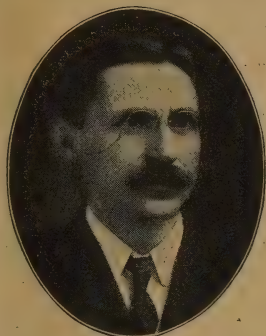
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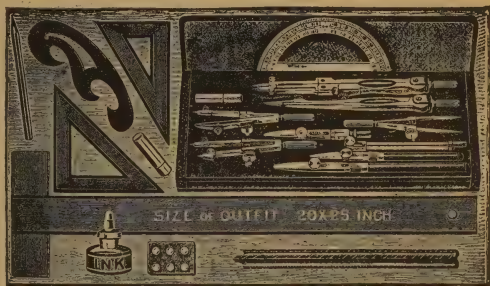
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Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY Publishers of THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge, and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24th, 1912, embodied in section 44. Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXLII

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 1922

NUMBER 3



The Fear-Sway

Part I

by *Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNFISHER.

THE city sand lot was suddenly transformed into a populous arena. In the crowd of business men there were a few ranchers wearing sombreros, a few with campaign hats. There were some women in blue gingham, a Choctaw poking his nose out of a glaring red blanket, a fat girl in squaw's waist and yellow skirt, and finally the thrill that always comes with a mob, any sort of mob.

Waitresses and stenographers leaned from all the windows into the beating glare of the sun. A Mexican who kept his chowcart in the lot, stopped peeling onions, and his clientele of tramps let their tamales turn to cold grease. A few stockmen from the shipping station sat on a fence, silent and skeptical. A cowboy stood before a tremendous tobacco sign which occupied the entire side of a building.

This cowboy was the only ambassador

there of the cattle country; rangy, broad-shouldered, wearing a curious yellow sombrero with a Hopi design of skulls and the thunderbird.

The assembly was gathered together, as many such assemblies had gathered in ages past, to witness the execution of a famous criminal. This time the criminal was a horse that had "gone bad."

In the center of the lot stood a heavy-boned black gelding, its stubborn, ordinary, Roman nose a foot from the tarweed of the ground. "Crater" was too large to be termed a cow-pony, too chunky for a racer. At first glance it would have seemed that he was good for only one thing—the wheel horse to a cannon limber. Huge and heavy, he stood over more ground than an ordinary cart-drawer; a good-sized hoof without the density of horn of a Percheron, and a large barrel with a fine spread of ribs. Although he appeared indolent and dejected, there was a certain red gleam in his eye that seemed to show there was one thing in the

world which would set him off—the sound of gun shooting.

A runty half-breed—Mexican and Yuman—dressed in a baggy suit and lop-brimmed hat, acted as wrangler, holding the beast's headstall at arm's length. Only one other person went near the outlawed nag: a girl with brown weebegone eyes and a piquant face, on which, temporarily, there was written all the sorrow of the chief and only mourner of the condemned criminal.

It was plain to be seen that nobody else in that mob proposed to shed a tear for the black Crater. The general atmosphere, in fact, was one of extreme festivity. The excitement and yipping was more suggestive of the feature event of a round-up than of an execution. But under the giant Bull Durham sign there was perhaps one person other than the girl who felt the seriousness of the situation.

To the cow-puncher who had come to witness the death of Crater the scene had an element of the tragic. To him the death of a horse—particularly the death of a famous man-killer—was as portentous certainly as the hanging of some half-breed brand-blotcher. In the minds of puncher-boys it must be said a horse has a soul, whereas a Mexican rustler has not. In fact, just as the girl put her hand frantically upon the six-gun which the wrangler had drawn, the cowboy edged his way through the crowd and walked up to the center of the lot.

The girl's brown eyes had welled with tears, which now began to flow down over her cheeks. The cowman took off his broad-brimmed hat, and, as the crowd began to laugh at him, he dug the toe of a huge boot into the sand. The big face reddened furiously, all except his nose, which, like his neck, was already the redness of beefsteak. It was a Roman nose and it suggested something of the cussedness of the condemned broncho.

"It don't appear to me, miss, as if you're crazy to see that critter stretched out."

The girl's face brightened. The cowman for the first time saw how every feature seemed to light up, reflecting perfectly a succession of desires: hopelessness and then hope, admiration, an audacious and then a bashful smile, and confidence.

"I'm trying to reconcile myself to losing Crater," she said. "But it's no use! I simply can't see him killed outright, particularly when he looks so forlorn."

"Like as not he's forlorn because he knows what's coming to him," the cowman remarked.

"I've begged my grandfather to keep him in the stables, just as a pet, or to give him away, anything rather than kill him, but it's useless. No one will take him. He killed one of the stable mozos last night. And as for his record in bucking—"

"I'm a stranger here—never heard of him—"

"Well, he's finished three men."

The cow-puncher whistled and took a careful look at the dejected outlaw. After a quick appraisal of all the beast's worst qualities he suddenly asked:

"Where is your grandfather, miss?"

"Why do you ask? He won't let you go near him."

"I'm thinkin' there might be a way," the puncher said quietly. "There might be a way to spare you cryin' any more about the cold-blooded murder of this man-fighter."

"You mean—you'll take him off our hands and—and save him!"

"Let's see your granddad."

The girl's grandfather had already heard the cowman introduce himself. He stepped forward, a brown derby cocked on one side of his head and his thumbs stuck arrogantly in a vest of bright green velvet embroidered with silk mignonettes.

"My name is Peter Gaunt," the silver-haired old fellow said, "and if you think you're going to ball up my show, you're mistaken."

"I hear you don't intend bumping off that rope hoss if any one takes him off your hands."

"Did you say you would take that load of TNT off my hands?" the little old man asked irascibly. "If you did you're mistaken. They ain't a man in the State can go within ten feet of him."

"How about that wrangler?"

"He's got a strap around the critter's lip. Besides, the old hoss knows he's a Mex and not worth kicking."

"Well, in the first place," the cowman retorted, "I'm not asking you for the horse. Don't want him. I thought maybe the girl here would like him for a pet—"

"Oh, you're doing this for my gal, hey?"

The cowman looked into the dancing blue eyes of the old man and reddened.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled. "A moment ago she was blubbering—"

"You object to my gal blubberin', hey?"

"Yes, sir—I—"

"Well, if you're that kind of a bird you better not get into the same lot with this here hoss. He'll bite you and paw you up so's they's nothin' left but chopped meat for to make enchiladas. That hoss can tell a guy that's shinin' up to my little gal, no matter if he's a mile off."

"Maybe he'll let me ride him, then!" the buckaroo suggested.

This remark was greeted with a roar of laughter from the ring of men forming around Gaunt, the girl and the cowboy. Old Gaunt himself took his thumbs out of his green vest and waved his hands frantically in the air as the cowman continued:

"I mean what I say—ride him! Gentle him! And turn him back to the girl. She wants him for a pet."

Gaunt took out a fat cigar, pointing it up to the cowman's face.

"Now, put this in your mouth and shut up," he said. "I don't want no fine young puncher-boy like you to get his back broke, particular if he wants to do it just to satisfy a whim of my little gal."

"I'm repeatin' what I said, Mr. Horse-owner!" the puncher affirmed aloud. "Slick ridin'. No hobbled stirrups, no locked spurs nor buckin' rolls—"

The crowd began to chime in with cries of "Ride 'im, cowboy!" and "Let 'er kick!" "Even odds, Mistah Gaunt!" and "Five hundred the cowboy eats rattleweed!"

Old Gaunt's eyes danced. The chance of some good betting thrilled him, and he was always eager to see again a bit of the old frontier life he had lived.

"Get your saddle," he finally said. "If it's for the little gal, I'll let you do this. But afore you gits up to the hurricane deck I want to tell you what you're in for."

By the yipping and cheers that followed

this agreement the whole lot knew that the horse was going to be given another chance. News spread through the streets that old Crater, the man-killer, was going to be tried again—and by some stranger hailing from a Texas cow-ranch. The street on which the lot faced was soon crowded with wagons, buckboards and saddle ponies. Men and boys jammed the little sand knolls overlooking the hollow of alkali and tarweed where the bronc-busting was to take place. Others filled every available door and window.

The excitement grew to a hullabaloo of cheering when the girl and the Mexican horse-boy, assisted by two mounted buckaroos, surrounded the black man-killer preparatory to blinding and saddling him.

"When I tell you about that thar hoss," old Gaunt said, "you'll change your mind—and I'm goin' to give you a chanst to back out gracefully."

"I'm not going to change my mind," the cowman said. "I'm goin' to ride 'im."

CHAPTER II.

RIDING THE CRATER.

OLD PETER GAUNT and the cow-puncher stood aside, the latter smoking his new cigar and watching with a whimsical composure the wrangling of the outlaw horse.

"What is, your name, Mr. Puncher-boy?" Gaunt asked.

"Tom Drury, Jeff Davis County, Texas."

"And your outfit?"

"The Tumbling Ace Cow Farm."

"Never heard of you, but the Tumbling Ace is famous in these parts. Have you any heirs?"

Drury looked down at the old man and burst into a chuckle. "What do you want to know for?"

"When a bronc-peeler undertakes to ride Crater it's an important point to settle up concernin' their heirs. Now I'm supportin' the families of three men right now which thought they could do some show-ridin' on that thar hoss. And I'm figurin' on supportin' yours."

"I haven't got any."

"Or heirs or assigns?"

"I'm not figurin' on givin' into the horse."

"Very well, then, if your mind's set on ridin' him I'm goin' to tell you in plain terms what you're going to ride. The dam of that thar hoss belonged to a old Yaqui chief which rode her into battle down in Mexico a short while back. The mare warn't a cayuse. She was a war horse bred from a cattle pony out of a racer. She carried one hundred and ninety pounds into gunfire ten weeks before foaling. When she foaled she gives the world this carcass of dynamite. A cattle man on the Rio Grande made a mistake and took the critter for a gift. For the first time in the world the Indian didn't take his gift back. The cattle man sells him to a round-up show concern, and I finally win him on the short end of a phony bet. Ever since he's brought trouble. There ain't a rancher in the State will buy that hoss from me, and what's made it worse, the critter has showed a liking to my little gal there. She's begged that I keep it in the stables, which I granted, until he killed a stable mozo for tryin' to feed him. Damn it, every bone in that horse, from his jaw to his postern, ain't a bone—it's a stick of dynamite—and it'll blow up if you so much as chuck to it!"

Up until now Crater had shown no particular interest in the cautious maneuverings of the wranglers who were to saddle him. It seemed, as the girl herself remarked, that the horse knew he had been condemned. He had stared dejectedly and vacantly before him, conscious of the fact that every one there was his enemy, except the girl, and that she had suddenly proved herself unreliable. She was now on the "other side." She who always maintained that Crater was wiser than any man would admit, said that he seemed to be waiting for some eleventh-hour friend to save him from destruction.

Tom Drury was that friend, but the old horse, judging by his actions from then on, did not seem to admit it.

The men on foot knew that it was too dangerous to attempt to bridle the animal. This must be left to the two men mounted on snubbing ponies. The Mexican gave the rope to one of these horsemen, who passed

it with one hitch about the horn of the saddle.

Crater immediately sensed trouble. He backed away as the snubbing horse sidled up to him, the rider taking in the slack of the rope as fast as he could. When old Crater's nose was drawn to within a yard of the saddle horn, the outlaw changed his mind about backing away.

Instead, he stood up on his hind feet and struck out viciously at the wrangler. The latter, to save his thigh and foot from being crushed, jumped out of his saddle, clinging to one side of his pony so as to keep it between himself and the outlaw's forestriking hoofs. While in this position the wrangler reached across his horse's back, yanked the snubbing rope and gave it a final hitch about the saddle horn. Crater thudded his hoofs into the belly of the snubbing pony and would have pounded the little animal to the ground if the wrangler had not succeeded in blinding the outlaw by stuffing a small gunnysack under the cheek straps. The Mexican now ran forward, dug his clawlike fingers into the nose of the blinded horse, and Crater, for a few moments, at least, gave in, snorting and champing in bewilderment.

"Now, look here, Mr. Stranger," old Gaunt said to Drury as the latter stepped down to the horse, "afore you make up your mind once and for all to set on that thar animal, I want to tell you somethin'. You can stick on lots of bucking horses by outguessing 'em. I mean by that, watching their muscles which tell you just what sort of a jump they're goin' to pull off next. But this here hoss don't give any such comfortable warning. Only a month ago Johnson Hawk, a Sioux champion buster, was throwed and trampled by old Crater—Johnson Hawk, who's won silver-studded saddles from every round-up between Texas and North Dakota. He tried to hook his knees into Crater's belly and found the damned horse warn't there! Johnson smashed his ribs on the horn of the saddle and then smashed his neck on a snubbin' post fifteen feet away. If Hawk did that, what do you reckon you can do?"

"Stay set," was the quiet reply, "and ride him."

Drury went down into the pit of the lot amid cheers and clapping. And Gaunt's granddaughter took his hand in a final shake. "Hoping you'll win," she cried enthusiastically.

"And not pull leather," he assured her.

Gaunt shook his head skeptically and joined his daughter on the top of the sand knolls. Jennie Lee was perhaps the only one there who did not look at the conflict with the sheer heartless desire to see a horse and a man in desperate conflict. To her the episode would perhaps mean the saving of her horse, and hence her interest in Tom Drury was not merely the interest of a woman for a devil-may-care, hell-bent hero.

She watched the big cowboy walk down to the beast and order the two horsemen, who were standing by, to hold the horse's head while he took a final look at the cinch. The riders on the snubbing ponies who were to act as "pick-up men," should that be necessary after the fight, held the outlaw's rope taut, preparatory to yanking off the blinds. Drury, after examining the saddle, stepped to the blinded horse, and dug his wiry fingers into the soft nose.

"Smell of that hand, old Mr. Outlaw!" he said. "I'm going to ride you all over hell!"

He shouted to the wranglers to give him the halter rope and a good straightaway for the first buck. He leaped, pony-express fashion, onto the horse's back, found his stirrups, and yelled at the wranglers to let him kick. The two little ponies were wheeled where they stood, and spurred off to the edge of the lot.

The outlaw stood a moment, as if blinded by the sudden glare of the sun and the ring of shouting faces about him. He seemed uncertain, for the fraction of a second, what to do about that vise which was squeezing into his flanks.

"He must know now that we're giving him another chance," the girl said to old Gaunt. "He must know that the bronc-buster is trying to save his life."

"But he ain't appreciatin' it overmuch," said Gaunt.

Jennie Lee looked back. The big black outlaw had kicked off into a series of

straightaway bucks, as if the cowman had stuck two red-hot spurs into his stomach. The girl saw that Drury had taken off his sombrero and was fanning the air with one hand while with the other he jerked up the horse's head closer with every buck.

"The cowboy will stay on if Crater doesn't try his sunfishing!" the girl cried.

"Damned if the boy didn't scratch him. He's sunfishing now!"

Old Crater stopped short in his straightaway buck, in which he had sent the crowd at one end of the lot scattering like a swarm of flies. He came with all his force upon his forefeet and then sprang backward, twisting in the air like a salmon caught on a hook. Drury was jerked halfway out of his saddle, his hat fell from his hand, and he grabbed frantically for the lost reins.

A silence fell on the crowd as they suddenly felt that the same old tragedy was to be reenacted.

For a moment horse and rider were lost in a cloud of dust, only the terrific thudding of the hoofs breaking the sudden hush. The girl strained her eyes, facing the sun, and saw the silhouette of the horse merging through the alkali mist. The rider was still clinging to the saddle, his head rocking back at every pitch with enough force, it seemed to the girl, to snap his neck.

Crater saw that he would have to try something else. The downright shock which came after his skyscraping was then coupled with a sidewise lurch at the very second when the rider was recovering his balance. The girl, as she watched, could detect each change of plan in the horse's mind. When Crater performed the side throw it had nearly always finished his antagonists. If that failed, the girl anticipated the next move.

She screamed frantically to the rider to give up. Other voices joined in the shout and the din swelled.

"Pull leather and give up!" they called. "You'll be up in the stars next!" But most of the voices were raised in cheers: "Stay with him, cowboy! Ride him! Bust him! Scratch his hide off'n him!"

The girl caught a glimpse of Drury just before the horse's most desperate move. The boy's head was snapped up from his

chest until it seemed his skull rocked back into his shoulder blades; his mouth and nose were bleeding, and his face blackened with dust. Then it was that old Crater tried his ugliest trick. He leaped into the air, twisted, and came down, giving the rider a combined downright shock and side wrench; and then fell backwards.

Drury snapped one foot out of the stirrups to save his leg from being crushed, and as the horse rolled he again grabbed the reins, winding them about his hand with a twist. Crater fell to his side, pawing wildly into the air. He felt again the crunching of the bit in his tongue, and the rowel of his rider's free foot digging into his stomach. It was Drury's chance to free his other foot and run for safety.

The crowd shouted wildly when they saw that instead of freeing himself, he clung to the horse's head with one arm, and drew the reins up with the other. The horse, writhing and pawing for a moment in the dust, shaking his head wildly with the torment of the bit, gave a final convulsive twist which brought him to his feet, and the cowboy, one leg hooked over the saddle, an arm about the horse's neck, was still clinging on.

When Crater regained his feet he gazed around at the yelling faces of the mob. His eyes bulged with rage and bafflement, his nostrils widened with vicious snorts. For the first time, as Jennie herself saw, Crater knew that he was mastered. He dug a groove into the dust as he tried vainly to loosen his mouth from the inexorable torture of the bit. Reddened foam flecked his torn lips, and his shaggy flanks were covered with lather and the dust where he had rolled.

The girl saw that the outlaw had given up. A prance or two, a moment's championing, one last curvet, and he stood panting and heaving with his head drawn up tight against his throat.

Drury beckoned to the wranglers, who rode up and grasped the reins under the mouth. When they had the horse securely snubbed, the cowboy dismounted in a deafening ovation of applause.

"The horse is yours!" old Gaunt shouted, shaking Drury's hand.

"It's for the girl," Drury replied.

"It's yours," the girl herself repeated. "I wanted its life saved. You are the only man that can ride it. The horse is your reward."

"I didn't do this business for a reward."

"You did it for that gal, if I understand correctly," old Gaunt said with twinkling eyes.

"Yes, you understood correctly."

"Well, do you reckon you'd do it again?"

"Certainly. I would."

"If she gave you a chance, would you do something else—something that has more danger—even than the buckin' of that thar outlaw?"

Tom Drury looked puzzled for a moment, and then glanced down at the face of the girl. She herself seemed dumfounded at her grandfather's remarks. Tom had a good long look at her brown eyes shining with excitement, her flushed, delicate skin, her full half-parted lips. The smile that she gave him was the curious, wondering smile of a woman who has seen a man of unlimited power. It was like the ancient smiles of Greek women who looked upon horsemen and worshiped them as centaurs. When he saw that smile the bronc-twirling, big-boned youth laughed back his answer to the old man's question: "Why, yes, I reckon I'll do anything—anything you say."

CHAPTER III.

THE QUEST.

"IT'S a long ride I'm goin' to ask you to take," Peter Gaunt said to the cowpuncher. "And there's no horse in the country better fitted for it than the horse you just busted. That old outlaw looks to me like he'd be the fastest range rider in the West. The best description you can give him is that he's a horse for to go killin' with. With him you can ride circles around any Mexican's cayuse on this or the other side of the Rio Grande. You can get in and out of range at will, choosing your time for fighting and your time for quitting. Bearin' those facts in

mind, and also the general impression you yourself made on me on first sight, I'm goin' to give this here outlaw to you for a certain reason, and I'm going to tell you that reason up to my hotel."

Gaunt returned to his men and gave them directions to put a brand-new, silver-studded, hand-carved saddle on Crater's back. Meanwhile the girl took Tom Drury to the hotel in the buckboard.

"Grandfather has his own mount and will follow us," she said.

In another moment they were clattering down the main street of the city through the dispersing crowd, cheering behind them as they passed.

"I know what this quest is to be," the girl said. "And I want to tell you what it really means to us. What I am going to tell I know my grandfather will not speak of, because he is too proud. It is a quest which means everything to him—to his honor—to his name, his life."

"What I am going to do, then, is for Peter Gaunt?" Tom asked with a note of obvious disappointment.

The girl laughed softly. "Grandfather asked if you would do another deed like the breaking of Crater—only something infinitely more dangerous—"

"For you—those were his words."

"Yes. It means as much for me—only in a different way. But the tragic part of it concerns him. You see, he is one of the old stock, and all the people around here look up to him as being of an old fighting line of frontiersmen: his father was a famous old sheriff. Grandfather himself has served as the chief of the Vigilantes for years and years. Even before I was born the people looked up to him as a sort of protector. He knows this, and there is nothing that would make him happier than to think now that he is growing too old for fighting—that he could justify what they think of him. And here is where the pathos of it all comes: a bandit has been terrorizing the range just beyond the desert to the west. He has a band, and rules over practically everyone—good ranchers and bad. Grandfather knew that it was his duty to oust this man and his band, but he has never been able to catch him. Grand-

father himself has been driven out of his own ranch, which happens to be in the center of the gang's domain. That is his tragedy, this dear old man whom everybody once looked on as the deliverer."

"And this was *your* ranch, too—your home?" Drury asked, harping back to his own line of thought.

"Yes, it is my ranch and my home," the girl admitted. "And what makes it so unbearable for me is this: grandfather would have stayed there on his ranch and fought the gang. Every one knows he would prefer death to such a retreat as he has made; he has come here to live in the safety of a city hotel, and for what reason do you think? For my sake—that is the reason. He has me to think of now. And just to keep me absolutely safe, he prefers giving up this old fighting name."

"I wouldn't call it such a tremendous disgrace, then," Drury commented.

"No; but you do not know my grandfather. Every day he frets and worries and plans how he can rid the range of this bandit and his gang. He has gotten up posses time and again, and men have been killed. A year ago he succeeded in getting the sheriff to go on the hunt. The sheriff was killed. Then a Federal marshal was killed. The present sheriff, who is a coward, is—according to grandfather's opinion—secretly in league with the outlaws. The years have gone by, and still the bandits have thrived. Some have been caught, sentenced to life imprisonment; others hanged. The head of the gang, whom no one has ever seen, has never been found. And it is to get that man that you are being sent into the desert. Grandfather knows that he is too old to fight now. Younger men are needed. But whoever it is who gets this outlaw leader makes no difference. The one ambition of Peter Gaunt is that the man and his gang be wiped out. Until that happens my grandfather will think that he is going down these declining years of his life disgraced and unworthy of the great trust the people have put in him."

Tom Drury's answer was full of enthusiasm.

"It's a great job you're giving me!" he cried. "To help out an honorable old man

and restore a home to his little girl. I'll make a big boast to you here and now, and it's an honest-to-God boast, too: I'm going into the desert on the war horse you've given me, and until I've wiped out the murderers infesting it, I'll not come back. I'll never head eastward again, I promise you that, until I can come and say to you, 'Your old rancho is ready and safe for you, and the chief, your granddad, can live in honor and peace.'

The little buckboard rattled up in front of the Eldorado Hotel just as Peter Gaunt himself, mounted on a roan saddle horse, caught up with them.

Drury bade good-by to the girl, shaking the hand she offered him with a reassuring grip.

"Don't tell grandfather what I have said," she whispered.

Old Peter Gaunt invited the cowpuncher into the buffet of the hotel, where, he remarked, they could get acquainted and look each other over with the aid of red-eye.

The little scene in which Tom found himself was a curious combination of figures observed in a modern, overgrown, Western city and a remnant of frontier days. The group that gathered around the two men revealed the well-dressed lawyer or banker rubbing elbows with some raw-boned, stove-up live-stock manager, or some Choctaw roaring with his oil-field riches, and still wearing an otter-skin belt and grizzly-claw necklace with his brand-new store suit.

But the most picturesque man there was Peter Gaunt, his eyes as clear and sharp as a hawk's, and his wind-burned face a violent contrast to the silver-white hair. The bartender, a small, pallid man with a black mustache, shined the mahogany before him fawningly, and got out Gaunt's customary drink with a conscious pride that he was serving one of the old frontier characters. The drink Gaunt offered Tom Drury was not gin or red-eye or jackass brandy, to which the cowboy was obviously by nature better adapted, but a split of champagne.

"Now, my boy," Gaunt began, "just why are you in this part of the country?"

"I left the Texas ranch where I was

working because the place got too all-fired tangled up with cattle-proof fences."

"Pardon me if I remark casual-like that your words suggest certain thoughts which I ain't got the nerve to put into words."

"You think I'm a rustler," Drury laughed. "That's not why I object to cattle-proof fences. My main objection is in the fact that without stock-proof wire your chances of mixing in with fights are reduced to nothing. I asked my foreman why he didn't send me out on any more fights, and he said that the times were changing too rapidly. The place was getting plumb disgustingly civilized. He said it was time for us to go into New Mexico or Arizona, where the fences hadn't spoiled the ranges yet. So we went. He got a job in Doña Anna County, where they said he'd find some good gunshooting. He advised me to go still farther west and hire out with some rancher who was in need of a sharpshooter. So I've come here to offer myself as the personal stock-proof fence for any cattle-king who wants me."

"Well, I want you," Peter Gaunt answered. "And I'm thinking at last I've got the right man for the job."

The crowd of ranchers and Indians stopped their drinking as if the old rancher was about to deliver a speech, which in the main was his intention.

Old Gaunt's approach to the subject at hand interested Drury in a very particular way. The girl, Drury recalled, had considered the quest as a move which was all-important only because it would lead to the ultimate happiness of her grandfather. Gaunt, on the other hand, looked at the matter as something of vital interest to his little girl. "It's for Jennie Lee's sake you are to do this," he confided. "Until you know how that gal cherished the old rancho where her childhood was spent, you cannot know how all-fired anxious I am for you to succeed in doing this here deed I'm going to ax of you."

"I have a pretty good idea," Drury put in.

"Oh, no you haven't. Don't start out thinking you know something you don't. You ain't a gal in the first place, and you probably don't understand how a gal gets

to love every cranny in the old walls, every vine, every little note of the fountain which used to play in the *patio*—and all that stuff! You know what I mean—all that stuff that a gal thinks is so damned important.”

“I know what a rancho is like,” Tom admitted.

“Well, the long and short of it, Mr. Puncher-boy, is this: that little gal is just pining away with homesickness. That’s what. And here I am—plenty of money—enough to buy her a dozen other ranchos; but what good are they, I’ll ax you? What good is this whole damned hotel if I bought it for you? They ain’t the same walls, are they, now? They ain’t the same odors of pepperwood and sage like what we used to smell back thar. Course they’s other odors to this here hotel—but nothin’ that—well, you know what I mean.”

“There’s nothing like the purple sage to get your memories going back,” Tom admitted. The rest of the men in the saloon chimed in, swearing to the truth of his remark.

“Now, they’s a bandit out in that thar country where my rancho is,” Gaunt explained. “And he has as his henchmen three of the lousiest murderers that ever carried a runnin’ iron or a notched gun. Now you’ll say to me, you’ll say, ‘What the hell can three crooks and a leader do ag’in’ the order of a civilized country?’ Now tell me, Mr. Puncher-boy—ain’t you thinkin’ that right now?”

“I admit—”

“Sure! You admit it. Well, I’ll tell you you’re crazy, Mr. Puncher, to ever refer to this here part of the country as civilized. Why, this shag-gutted, white-livered sheriff who stays in this here town wouldn’t any more lift a finger to harm a hair of them bandits’ huids. And why—I ask yer, why? Scairt! That’s why. Just as plumb scairt as a cholo woman is of a dehorned steer! And it’s the way with every one else—”

“And damned lucky it is!” the bartender put in. “The last sheriff got potted by one of the gang. And then the marshal—”

“You keep out of this, barkeep. I’ll tell him of the danger later on. As I was say-

in’, Mr. Puncher-boy, this here outlaw king has got such a firm holt on the country that all the ranchers—peaceful and warlike, straight and crooked—are on his side. Not one dares to lift a hand for fear he’ll get a death sentence pronounced on him. And every attempt I’ve made the last five years for to get this outlaw and his gang, has failed. My men have been plugged, bumped off, whisked away. And every new failure strengthens the fear-sway this bird holds over the range. They’s only one way to bust that fear-sway and it’s for one man to sneak into that thar country and find this outlaw king—and—”

“What does he look like?” Drury asked.

The crowd burst out into an impolite laugh. “Now he’s axed you somethin’, chief!” the barkeep cried.

“You sure have axed me somethin’ thar, Mr. Puncher-boy!” Gaunt said with a tremendous, lugubrious sigh. “And the answer is this: I don’t know. Not a man in this here room knows. Not a man on the whole damned range knows. And if you’ll believe it I’ll tell you this: not even his own gang knows!”

Drury laughed scornfully at this news, but found that his laugh was going flat on a dead silence. “It’s impossible!”

“Yes, you’d say so. I believe it is, too. But the methods of this here outlaw are peculiar. In fact, they’re so ornery crawl-in’ and sneakin’ that folks call him the Gila Monster. And he sort of helps his fear-sway along by stylin’ hisself the Gila. It’s generally understood that he gets his gang together by goin’ to their hidin’ places and whistlin’ a sort of hissing whistle. And they troop after him. They used to only be one. But he’s added to ’em one by one and we’ve shot ’em off one by one. Only he adds faster’n we shoot, so that now he’s got three henchmen. And so long as the Gila himself lives it don’t do us no good to shoot his gang. Two heads spring on the damned monster as fast as we cut one off—as the old story of Hercules goes in the Bible.”

“It’s up to me then to find out just who this bird is, and get him before I go horsing around after his gang,” Drury said. “And it’s going to be easier than you’re

making out. I don't believe a man can lead a gang and keep his identity a secret from the gang itself."

"Well, you'll believe it sooner or later," Gaunt replied dryly. "Here's one proof of it: most outlaw leaders get discovered by some member of their own gang givin' 'em away, either for spite, or maybe for fear and self-protection, or maybe on their deathbed. But this here Gila has never been give away. And all because he won't let his gang see his face. He leads 'em masked. That's how he helps along his rep as some terrible unbeatable monster."

"But his voice—his gait—the way he rides a horse—all of those things—"

"Of course. Like as not his men could recognize him thataway. But in these here night raids it ain't too easy! And his face he never reveals. Then there's the mystery concernin' what he does with himself during the day. That's the strongest card he holds. It's understood he leads a double life. Maybe he's a respected rancher somewheres on the outskirts of his domain. Maybe he's a prospector; you can't tell."

"How's this gentleman here going to get him without he knows what he looks like?" the barkeep asked trenchantly.

"It 'll be best, since you're a stranger in these parts, to go into the desert with a guide," Gaunt advised. "You can take a look around the mountains and ranchos, and bein' no one knows you, you'll be able to pass off as a prospector." Gaunt turned to the audience. "Now, is there any of you birds that 'll offer to act as this man's guide?"

A general shuffling of feet was all he could get as an immediate answer to his question. Men edged behind each other, leaving their glasses half full on the bar. Others at the farther end of the crowd sidled into booths, some into the hotel, others out into the street.

"You see, Mr. Puncher-boy, the job is so dangerous that it ain't even possible to have a man show you how to get into this Gila's territory. They're afraid if it's knowed that they helped this here expedition of yours they'd get bumped off at night."

"Then I'll have to inquire the way," Drury said. "And hop to it alone."

"No, you won't, stranger," a voice said behind his shoulder. Drury and Gaunt both turned to look at the newcomer.

He was a man of about forty, dressed in the camper's outfit of khaki and puttees. His open shirt revealed a bare tanned throat, and his sleeves were rolled up on brown, finely muscled arms. The man himself had a sharply chiseled face, with black eyes, black eyebrows and scarred cheekbone.

"This here is Mr. Henry Sugg," Gaunt said. "A friend of mine and the slickest shot in the county. He's rode with us many a time when the Vigilantes went out tryin' to thin out the bad men. In fact, this here gent was the one as potted the last of the Gila's henchmen we got."

"I'm glad to meet you, stranger," Henry Sugg said to the cowboy. "I think I can get you a guide for this trip of yours. But the job is so dangerous that it might take me all afternoon hunting one up. Suppose you meet me here in this buffet to-night after dark? Meanwhile, get your grubstake ready—and I'll see that I have a man with a horse and his outfit ready for you."

Drury stared at the stranger. "Why are you so interested?"

Henry Sugg raised his black eyebrows, and then smiled. "I am interested in a lady who is in distress—a lady who is pinning away with homesickness!"

Gaunt slapped his friend on the back. "Now that's the good ole bull-throver, Sugg! There ain't a more chivalrous bird in town than this here Henry Sugg, Mr. Puncher-boy!"

"If your chivalry will get me a guide," Drury rejoined, "I'll be content to do the rest."

"That's talking, cowboy," Gaunt put in. "That's talking."

"And tell your granddaughter, Mr. Gaunt," Tom continued, "that if Crater can carry me far enough, and my six-gun can shoot straight enough, she sure will be seeing her old *patio* and its palm trees again."

The crowd, led by Mr. Henry Sugg, broke out in a cheer, and Gaunt ordered a split of champagne for every man present.

The white-haired frontiersman held up his glass, and when the room was again

quiet, he announced: "Be it understood, gents, one and all, that if this here stranger brings back the Gila I'm going to give him a reward—anything he asks, as the old say-in' goes—up to half my kingdom."

Tom Drury held up his glass before the others drank. "And be it also understood, gents, that Tom Drury's not specifying what he wants for a reward, but it's not going to be a kingdom. It's going to be something else—something I've set my heart on, and I'm not saying what it is until I bring back the Gila Monster roped and hog-tied ridin' on a jack."

"Here's hopin' you'll come back yourself," Sugg remarked, holding up his glass.

"And ridin' somethin', yourself, beside a hearse," the barkeep added.

It was thus that Tom Drury made his vow in the little buffet of the Eldorado Hotel and drank to it in company with twenty witnesses.

"Well, I got to be hurryin' off," Gaunt said as the glasses were drained. "I promised I'd go ridin' with the little gal and she'll be givin' me hell for leaving her settin' in the street so long!"

He edged his way through the crowd, and Drury, although uninvited, gravitated after him toward the direction of the buckboard.

"This stranger has just made a remark—and before witnesses," Peter Gaunt said to his granddaughter. "You are going to see your old home again. He promises you."

The girl's brown eyes widened with excitement, and Drury detected a new look in them.

"But have you thought of the danger?" she said. "Every man will be against you—not only the Gila's gang, but the ranchers who are silently on his side. No one has succeeded yet. Besides that, you will be fighting in the dark and in a country where water holes are rare and some poisonous, and where mirages are on every horizon."

"Your granddad told me everything," Tom replied.

"And still you are going?"

"Yes."

"Why are you risking your life for this?"

"Well, if you must know, I'll tell you. Your granddad said you're pining away

with homesickness. And down in the outfit I come from in Texas thar's not a puncher-boy living that wouldn't want to do something when a girl says she's homesick. A puncher-boy just can't bear to see a lady in distress."

The girl looked at him for a moment, and then her mouth trembled and smiled. Before either spoke she reached down into the bottom of the buggy where a holster, cartridge belt and revolver were lying.

"This is the gun that was to have shot old Crater," she said. "My father gave me this. I am going to lend it to you to get your man. They say Crater would have made the fastest horse in the county—if a man could only stay on him. It has been said of this that it is the best balanced six-gun in the State."

"My son-in-law won every championship in the army with it," the old grandfather said proudly. "And there's plenty of smashing power in that there piece. Young Lee, before the Hopis got him, did more than win championships with it."

Tom Drury took the piece in his hand. It was an army Colt, thirty-eight caliber on a forty-four frame. No gun could have been manufactured to more perfectly fit the needs of Tom Drury. He knew how to fan a trigger—had practiced it for hours every day since his hand was big enough to hold a piece. The forty-four caliber Tom knew was disconcerting particularly to a gunman like himself who had perfected his shots with the much lighter kick of a thirty-eight. With a forty-four frame the kick, particularly to a hand of Tom's strength, was practically eradicated.

"I'm thanking you," he said to the girl. "This looks as if it could get results."

"With the best gun and the best horse," the girl replied, "I feel confident."

"That's all I need," Drury replied.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GUIDE.

DRURY'S preparation for his trip took a good part of the remainder of that day. He outfitted himself with two weeks' supplies, estimating that for the first

week he would need enough for two men: flour, bacon, boned ham, tea, sugar, cereal, raisins, beans, and dried vegetables.

Shortly after sundown he called at the Eldorado buffet, where the pale-faced barkeep with the black mustache was engaged in his endless work of drying whisky glasses with a damp towel. When he saw Drury enter he immediately put down his things and stepped out from the bar.

"Everything's jake," he said, looking around surreptitiously. He called to a man snoozing at one end of the sud-covered tables. "Now, then, Soggy, get out'n here while I sprinkle sawdust." Soggy shambled to the door and disappeared. The barkeep then closed the door which led into the hotel foyer and bolted the swinging doors which opened on the sidewalk.

"What's all the mystery for?" Drury asked.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Bronc-buster, the guide who has consented for to lead you into the Gila's country ain't over anxious to be seen by the townfolk. You see, it's too dangerous a business. Might it would spread around through the town that this here bird was acting as your assistant and then, like as not, some member of the Gila's gang would get wind of it from a sheepherder or mucker. Then what? Well, Mr. Guide would find himself bumped off, lyin' out in a clump of cactus waitin' for some one to find his bones."

The barkeep, when he was assured that there was no chance of his actions being spied on from either the doors or the windows, pointed over his shoulder with his thumb:

"The last booth down to the corner of the bar."

Drury walked to the place indicated, drew aside the red plush curtains, and found himself in a little compartment with a large, broad-shouldered, heavily tanned, smiling man.

"You are my guide?" he asked, staring with a certain amount of astonishment at the sharply chiseled face and jet-black eyes of Henry Sugg.

"Yes. Of course I could not announce it this afternoon when I met you," Sugg replied. "You see, there were too many

people in the room. And if it became known that I was to help the man who is gunning for the Gila—"

"Yes, I understand that part of it."

"Mr. Sugg's a quick draw and a hard rider," the barkeep said as he drew the plush curtains to shut the two men in together. "I reckon he'll go as far as you dare go yourself. Further and more, he knows where the water holes are, likewise the mirages."

The sharp steel-like glitter of Sugg's eyes did not seem to belie the barkeep's eulogy. Drury himself could not take his gaze from those eyes. They were far more important in his appraisal of the man than his winning smile.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Sugg," Drury said. "But if you profess to be a guide, how do you intend to lead me to the Gila when you don't know what he looks like?"

The man's smile tightened, almost winsomely, and the barkeep burst into a hearty guffaw.

"I reckon you got me there, stranger." The guide laughed good-naturedly. "Damned if I know how to prove I'm competent!"

"Didn't old Gaunt tell you this aft that Mr. Sugg is one of the Vigilantes?" the barkeep asked from the other side of the curtain.

"I'll take a chance on you, Mr. Sugg," Drury said. "If you've actually shot one of the outlaws yourself, then I think you'll bring matters to a conclusion all the quicker. I'm anxious to get the game played and over with, so's I can get back to town. My interests are all in town now, so to speak. You look like a sharp one, so let's saddle 'em up and go."

The guide rolled a cigarette with a deliberateness that arrested Tom's attention. "First I want to say something," he remarked coolly. "I'm advisin' you not to go on this here trip."

"I'm hirin' you to show me how to get there, not how to stay home," Drury replied.

"No man can get this Gila any more than you can get a swig of water from a mirage. The Hopis say he's a witch doctor. They say he can turn into a mole or a buz-

zard or a coyote at will like all their ancient medicine men. They fear him like they do the thunder—and it's the same with the white men—"

"There's nothing dangerous about thunder," Drury said. "I'm beginning to think that this outlaw only has his power in a fear-sway which he wields over the ignorant Indians and lonely cowboys. I'm going to break that spell before another month's gone by."

"That's all easy enough to say if it was known just who this Gila is. But when you're talking about some unknown, supernatural thing—"

"Supernatural hell! He's probably a crook—some master-mind crook from the East who does things in a new way and knows how to start a lot of legends about himself and a lot of claptrap among the Hopis and Foxes." I'll bust into it if he's got a carcass big enough to hit with a forty-five."

The guide smiled knowingly. "Maybe a forty-five can't hurt him. That's one of the legends about him."

"Then this fist," Drury continued. "Or the hoofs of my horse Crater. All I'm asking you to do is to take me to the Gila Range. Then if you're so all-fired scared of this witch man you can come back."

"All right—if that's the agreement, I'll go. But I'll wager you this: that once I take you into the desert you'll change your mind. It's not an ordinary desert. It's a big, sizzling yellow plain in which every pool where you want to water yourself or your horse turns out to be either quicksand or a mirage. Men have gone crazy out there hunting for gold. Gold is something you can feel and touch, something easier to find than the Gila."

"The reward I'm going to ask when I get back is worth all that," Drury said. "If you're willing to act as my guide, knowing that I'm well aware of the dangers of what I'm about to perform, I'm engaging you here and now, and we can take the trail before sundown."

"There's an old, deserted ghost town on the edge of the Gila's dominion known fifty years ago as Desolation. I'll take you within sight of that town, and from then on

it's up to you to shift for yourself. Will that suit you?"

"It seems fair enough to me. I didn't figure on hiring a guide who was going to help me actually rope the critter himself."

"Very well, then," Sugg concluded. "I'm to be your guide, but I don't want to be seen in this saloon with you—or in this booth. I will stay here for a while. You will go into the street, and if any one asks you who your guide is say you've decided to go without one. Tell them since you're a stranger you feel it will be safer than having some man that every one knows tagging along after."

"That's agreeable to me."

"And to-night we will start under cover of darkness and leave the city by different roads, you taking the old Lazy-J trail. We will meet at Donkey Bluffs three miles west. There is a little jacali there and a pool where we can water our horses before the desert ride. You will find it on the crest of the bluffs, and I will have a fire burning there outside, so you won't miss it. At midnight we can start down into the desert."

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERT'S HORIZON.

THAT night when Drury set out on his quest he again mounted the back of the outlaw Crater. This time the big gelding knew his master. He pranced and snorted when he felt the scratching rowels, but after a few uncertain buckjumps he set out obediently on his course. The ride to Donkey Bluffs was covered without a protest, and from then on the man-killer knew that Drury's hand on the reins was law.

When they arrived at the little adobe hut on the crest of Donkey Bluffs Sugg was there, as planned. At the first sight of his guide Drury was again impressed with his extraordinary appearance. The picture of Henry Sugg on his blood bay was little short of magnificent. The silver studding of his saddle, the metal cuffs of his chaps, the glittering spurs—and above all, the man's superb seat, as if he were a part of the horse—struck a curious bewilderment in Drury's mind.

"Those are pretty good clothes you've got on that horse," he remarked dryly.

"It's not the way guides generally dress."

"All the better for me," Sugg laughed. "The last United States marshal who went gunning for the Gila rigged up as a Mexican bandit. That's old stuff. Sheriff Horner tried the same. Both were shot. The Gila knows all the Mexes on this range—knows 'em personally, because they're all on his side. No wonder he took a dislike to Horner and the marshal."

After watering their horses the two men rode down the zigzag trail which led from the crest of Donkey Bluffs to the sage-plain below. All that night they rode across the breast of the plain while the horizon flattened to a circle about them, and above a swarm of stars wheeled westward, blazing in the thin air.

Before dawn the guide's bay was pounding heavily on the trail, stumbling at every excuse, but the rider pressed him on. Drury's huge mount showed no trace of the long night's ride, save a flecking of sweat which powdered to salt as the sun rose. When the first rays peeped over the eastern rim of the plain they fell across to the opposite horizon, which was broken by a looming fortresslike mesa.

"That mesa is the limit of our ride today. Beyond it is the Gila Range, and I don't figure either of us want to do too much traveling on that range by daylight."

Accordingly the guide suggested that they camp until noon, giving the horses their much-needed rest after the long ride. Dismounting, Sugg immediately set about to build a fire of sage sticks and started a smoke smelling strongly of turpentine. Drury meanwhile unsaddled the horses, leaving the blankets so that their steaming backs would not cool too quickly. A little breakfast of bacon followed, and cups of coffee, which used up their canteens of water. Then came a short rest, during which Drury, fatigued from his ride and the excitement of the previous day, dropped off to a troubled snooze.

At noon another bite to eat, a restful drag on a cigarette, nosebags on horses; then, saddling and bridling, they again took the trail.

After an hour's canter on the plain the mesa towered in the sky above them. Drury could see its buttresses of sandy shales and rain-painted chalks. At first it was like a tower in a lake, because of the mirages at its base, but as the horsemen advanced—a matter of an hour's steady loping—the waters receded, and the mounts slowed to a sudden ascent of the trail which led through the bowlders of the first rise.

The alkali dust which had enveloped them during almost their entire ride had provoked a terrific thirst in both the riders and their horses.

"If this water hole you're leading me to happens to be a mirage—" Drury began.

"It will be no great matter."

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"It is not very far from civilization."

"Not yet, no. But we are getting farther and farther away."

"I reminded you when we first agreed to go on this ride together that you would probably change your purpose when out on the desert."

"I have not changed my purpose."

"We have seen no quicksand yet."

"I will not change my purpose then, either."

"Wait and see."

The big shock came when they saw the pool.

According to Sugg's rudely sketched map, the pool could be found between a giant boulder and a clump of barrel cactus. As the mirages lifted before them they got their bearings. A scrambling climb along the trail, during which they dismounted, leading their horses, brought them halfway up the cliffs. A lone boulder deposited on the edge of the adobe banks was easily found.

To the north across a sharp, deep arroyo they saw the cactus, and beyond a long stretch of "sky-blue water." The real water they were looking for would be at the bottom of the arroyo. Accordingly they climbed down the rocky defile, and Drury learned the truth.

In the bowl-shaped hollow he could see nothing but the bed of what had once been a pool. The walls were brilliantly colored with banded rocks of pink and lurid red.

Up to a certain level where the last evaporation had begun every boulder and stick and stone was incrustated with salt crystals which reflected blindingly with the rays of the sun.

Drury looked into Sugg's face. It was not a look of despair or exasperation; it was merely a cool, questioning stare.

"I didn't figure on the drought finishing the pool up so fast," Sugg explained. "The last time I was here—"

"Mr. Sugg, listen to me," Drury interrupted. "Explanations aren't going to slack the thirst of our mounts—or of our own tongues. All I hired you to do was to bring me within sight of Desolation. From then on it's up to me to get my own food and drink. If you're worrying now about our famishing, the best you can do is to show me Desolation and take me by the shortest, straightest route, before either of us keels over with sunstroke. You do that, and I won't blame you for this dried pool."

"Now, look here, Mr. Drury," Sugg said in his usual softly modulated voice, "I warned you about this part of the country. I told you in particular to think about the desert and the sun and the mirages before you took the step. You said, 'Oh, that 'll be all right, Mr. Sugg—that 'll be all right!'"

"And then I warned you about this two-gun gent that men have never been able to identify, and you said the same thing. 'That 'll be all right, Mr. Sugg,' you said. Well, before I see you climbing down the trail on the other side of this mesa to your destruction I'm going to give you one more last point to think about—"

"I'm going without considering any more of your friendly remarks," Drury interrupted.

"Yes, I know, I know, Mr. Drury. It's plain to be seen by the look in your eye that you're going to stick to the hunt. But I reckon I can give you a good big surprise first, and this is it: your reason for going, as you made public in the Eldorado buffet, was that you were a chivalrous puncher-boy from Texas with the intentions of helping a woman in distress. That woman in distress is the granddaughter of old Peter Gaunt. You are doing this business

for her so's she will be restored to her home—"

"I reckon I'll admit that," Drury said.

"And your reward—"

"I kept my mouth shut about the reward I was going to ask," Drury said quickly.

"Yes, but any one could figure it—"

"But not say it."

"The sun's beatin' down on our heads, Mr. Drury. Our brains are beginning to sizzle up—but what I'm going to say I'm going to say. It's the only one thing in the world that maybe will bring you to your senses and keep you from going down there to your death."

"I'll say again I'm going."

"You're going for the sake of a girl. The Gila has sworn that girl is for him."

"A lie!"

"Gaunt did not tell you that, then?"

"Hell, no!"

"He did not tell you that the real reason he is afraid to go back to the ranch with his daughter is that the Gila wants her!"

"Then my job is the same—only I have more cause now! When I draw on the Gila I'll aim straighter, knowing that I'm killing a lousy cutthroat who thinks he can so much as mention that girl's name and get away with it."

"Let me remind you that if the Gila finds that you yourself are in love with the girl he will work a terrible revenge on you."

"Who is this horror that you want to make me quake about?" Drury laughed.

"A man who can tote two guns and fire 'em both so's it sounds as if one shot killed two men."

"I reckon I've got four shots in this chamber of mine that will kill four men—the three bandits and their leader, the old Mr. Gila Monster."

Sugg burst into a raucous laugh. "That is a good joke, isn't it, now?"

"A joke?"

"Your making that boast now, when we are both liable to keel over with sunstroke."

"I made a vow that I would get the Gila Monster," Drury replied. "And do you think I could go back to that town now and say I give up because one of the water holes in the desert is dry?"

They rode on. Both men took a drink,

and the guide, seeing that Drury had drained his flask, offered him a swig.

"There's another pool eight miles farther," he explained. "This will brace you till ye get there."

The patter of hoofs was the only undertone to a long silence. Finally Sugg, assured that the whisky had helped the disposition of both, resumed the conversation.

"What just happened back there at that dried pool has made me change my mind," he began.

"About what?"

"I'm thinking that you have guts enough to stick to this chase till you meet your man."

"And get him."

"Perhaps. But when I first offered to go out on this man-hunt I figured you'd give out when you found the first dried water hole. That's where most posses give out. But if you stick to the chase in the face of sunstroke I'll say that you're showing something I didn't bargain for. I'm with you in this fight until the finish."

Drury glanced up, surprised.

"Then you aren't just a guide!" he exclaimed. A new enthusiasm, as well as the swigs of whisky he had taken, warmed his voice.

"From now on count on me until the end. I consider it lucky that I met you. It's been many years that I myself wanted to go out and get this Gila. But if you want me to speak the candid, shameless truth—I didn't have the nerve. I've been sort of waiting until a man like you would come along. I was waiting in the saloon when old Gaunt brought you in and put the game up to you. I sized you up. I said to myself, 'He's got the strength and the eye—and the hand for a six-gun; but has he got the nerve?' Well, I've found out you have. The only thing now, I said to myself, is a question of how he's heeled."

"I'm carrying a piece that was forged to my specific order by the devil himself—a thirty-eight."

"The Gila, I've heard tell, carries a forty-five which they say had once been a self-cocker. The Gila took out the dog and converted it into a single-action gun. There

is no double kick to it—and a double kick has balled up the shot of many a gunman in days past."

"There's no kick at all to mine," Tom boasted.

"The hell you say!"

"I didn't mention the fact that this gun of mine is a thirty-eight caliber on a forty-four frame!"

The guide stared, riveting his eyes on the piece which Tom drew from his holster. As they jogged along Tom snapped up his hand, fired, and blew off the little waxlike white flower on the highest prong of a sojuaro cactus.

"That's a pretty good shot for twenty yards!" the guide cried enthusiastically. He drew his gun out as they jogged past, and at a distance of ten yards aimed at another of the little white flowers.

Drury laughed at the miss. "That one little kick is what spoils your shot."

"Perhaps. If I could do it with your piece it would prove you are right. It would also prove that you can match yourself up against the Gila with his single-action weapon. Let me see your gun."

Drury handed it over to his guide, and the latter picked out another target—a gopher scurrying for his hole under a rock. One shot cracked out, and the little brown body leaped forward, kicked, and convulsed.

"About thirty yards!" Sugg cried gleefully. "A magnificent gun, this." They jogged on, and Sugg cocked the weapon, spun the cylinder, then held his thumb to the barrel, reflecting the rays of the sun into the bore. "Clean as a whistle, too."

Tom Drury did not hear these last remarks. An electric shock had passed through him which made him pale like a man who had fallen in a faint. In the brief seconds which Sugg took to examine that gun a hundred fears were flocking into Tom's mind.

He evoked his first vision of Sugg in the buffet of the Eldorado Hotel—smiling, suave, polite. Sugg had offered to get a guide for the desert trip; he had met Tom in the saloon, blanketing the meeting in a complete and mysterious secrecy; he had later met him under cover of night at a safe

distance from the town. Not a soul knew that these two men were out in the desert together. Then, Tom recalled in the next flash, Henry Sugg had brought him farther and farther into the desert. They were now where no man would ever find them, and in a moment of braggadocio and utter thoughtlessness Tom had actually given this man his gun.

"Are you through with it?" he asked almost voicelessly.

Sugg laughed, reined his horse closer to the big gelding, and held the gun out to Tom at arm's length, saying:

"Take it! It's a beauty, but I'm damned if the Gila will ever give you a chance to get within range if he knows you're heeled with it!"

Tom reached for the gun, and as he did so he saw that the butt was not being held toward him. If he grasped it his fingers would close on the muzzle. And he noticed that there was a curious rigidity of the muzzle as it pointed directly at his heart.

Although the horses were jogging on, that

little gun barrel seemed immovable—like a bee which hangs a certain distance over a moving object. On the instant Drury looked up into Sugg's eyes—and he understood everything.

Those black, shining orbs revealed the whole truth of the situation in a single flash.

Drury knew then that Sugg was not a guide. And he knew that Sugg was not a man who was afraid to go down over the bluffs and across the desert or up to the mesa beyond into the Gila's domain. Sugg was not afraid of the murderers, the brand-blotchers, the renegades of the Gila Range. Sugg himself was the master mind of the whole gang, the man who hid under the mirage of a double life and directed his crimes from behind the dastardly respectability of a "leading citizen."

The man whom Drury had come to the desert to kill had acted as his guide, and Tom Drury knew in that fraction of a second that he was looking into the grinning mouth, the flashing teeth, the calm tight lips of the Gila Monster himself.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

THE CALL

BEGGARED of dreams

By all the nightmare glitter

Of carnal living

Which makes a poet fritter

Away and away,

Beyond forgiving,

Heavenborn themes

On ears of clay,

I shall embark,

God granting, on some schooner,

Some white-winged vessel

Willing to founder sooner

Than darken the sea

With Satan's trestle.

Freedom is—hark—

Calling to me!

Richard Butler Glaenger.

A Helper for Silent Simpson



by Charles Wesley Sanders

Author of "Shelby's Head-On Crash," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

SIMPSON LOOSENS UP.

AS the Eighty-six stopped at Hammond, Silent Simpson, chief of the road's police, saw that the superintendent's car was attached to the tail end. Simpson had a moment of hesitation. If the super had been old Maston, Simpson would have gone back and boarded the private car, but old Maston had been replaced six months before by a new and younger superintendent.

The new man, Blair, was as keen as a whiplash and not particularly fraternal with his men. Silent Simpson was the last person in the world who would be caught in the position of cultivating a superior officer. He didn't have to. Other jobs as good as this awaited him on other railroads. But he had spent the better part of his life on this road and didn't want to leave it.

He had organized a police force that was second to none in the country. He was fifty now, and the task of organizing another such force loomed pretty big. Besides, in Simpson's mind there wasn't another road in the world so good as the A. and P. With its western connections

it made a world-renowned coast-to-coast line.

As Simpson was about to go forward to the smoker, the superintendent leaned down from the forward end of his car, catching sight of the detective, whom he beckoned to join him.

"If you're going up the line get on board," the superintendent said.

Simpson followed him into the car. They sat down opposite each other.

"Anything doing?" Blair asked.

"I've just been over to the penitentiary, seeing a couple of friends of mine," Simpson answered in his low, husky voice.

"Officially?"

"In a way, yes."

Simpson settled himself in his chair and crossed his legs. He was a man of few words, as his nickname implied, but knowing the superintendent to be interested in anything concerning the road, he supposed he might as well acquaint him with the facts in the strange case he had had recalled to him that morning.

"One of our mail trains was run into an open switch a couple of years back," Simpson began. "The switch was opened on purpose to wreck her. I landed a couple

of men in the pen for a short stay on account of it. I hadn't much to work on and the evidence was pretty flimsy. The men's terms ended this morning. They have been set free. I wanted to have a look at them and a talk with them to see what their moods were. They're pretty sour."

"Were they professionals?" Blair asked.

"One of them," Simpson answered.

"The other was one of my own men."

"Policeman turned crook, eh?"

Simpson looked out of the car window, his deep-set brown eyes sober for the moment.

"It was strange," he said at last. "Jimmie Darrow seemed to be as straight as a string before this thing came up. At that time he was about twenty-five years old, full of pep, and with more brains than you meet up with in the general run. He had been working with me for four years and had never fallen down when it was humanly possible for a man to make good.

"A year before this business he married a girl over at Portage. She was the operator there. She's back there now. She got back her old job when Jimmie was sent here to serve his time."

"Bright-looking, auburn-haired girl," the superintendent said. "I've noticed her."

"Everybody notices her," Simpson said. "She was the belle of that village before Jimmie stepped in and won her. Nice a girl as ever lived."

"She divorced Darrow, I presume," Blair said.

"She did not. And yet in a way she quit him. She went once to the pen to see him and she hasn't been back. There have been no letters between them. Her father used to run freight here, and I knew him very well.

"I've known Rose ever since she was a kid. I took the liberty of telling her that she didn't have to stay tied up to a man in prison—but only got a cool stare for my pains. I put a couple of questions to her, and she said unless I could live up to the quiet part of my name I could be moving along. Since then she's gone about her business with her head in the air."

"Proud," Blair suggested.

Simpson nodded.

"How did you land Darrow?"

"One of my men happened to be on the train that was wrecked," Simpson answered. "He piled right off, unhurt, and got on the job. He saw a man running away from the wreck and he took after him. He didn't get him that night, but had a good look at him and landed him, a month later, in Buffalo.

"He located the places he had been loafing in hereabouts, and found a man who had heard him talk of Buffalo when he had been drinking a little too much. If you're patient you can generally pick up a trail like that, and my man did.

"This fellow has a bunch of aliases, but he's booked as Thomas Crane. Wouldn't let out a peep as to the men associated with him. Of course there *were* other men, because *he* was a cheap crook, a panhandler, if it came to that. We finally offered to let him off easy if he would squeal. He implicated Darrow.

"I didn't want to believe anything against Darrow, especially on account of his wife, but you've got to get so you believe almost anything in this game. So I began to trace Darrow's movements on the night of the wreck. One thing stood out right off the reel: Darrow hadn't been working for two days. He'd been reporting, but that was all. The trail led to shady places that he had been frequenting. He had met some men known to the police of several cities. He had had long talks with them.

"I went back to Crane for more dope. Crane appeared to hesitate, but the frankness with which he finally came through led me to believe that he was glad to get Darrow. He said Darrow had served time in a Michigan penitentiary before he went to work for me. I had that looked up and it proved to be true. He had served six months for a mean little theft in a store in his home town.

"We didn't have much of a case even when we had it all pieced out; but I had to shove it for what it was worth, and Crane and Darrow got two years apiece."

"You think Darrow was implicated in the wreck and that he associated himself

with a bunch of crooks to make some easy, quick money?" Blair asked.

"Oh, that would be the dope, but I have nothing to back it up," Simpson said.

"Wife extravagant?"

"Just the other way," Simpson said. "She showed us her bankbook and proved that part of Darrow's check went into a savings account every pay day. They had a nice little home and had got a good start. Darrow was wild about her. I knew that. He talked so much about her and his home that he was a kind of a pest."

"That might have been a pose," Blair said.

"No, it was no pose," Simpson said decidedly. "No man could talk the way Darrow did unless it was the real thing. And when we gathered him in, his first thought was of his wife. He begged us not to tell her—to railroad him to the pen and let her think he had disappeared. That was the big thing in his mind; how *she* would suffer, instead of the fact that he was accused of a crime."

"Wouldn't that be the big thing in a criminal's mind if he cared for a woman?" Blair asked. "Wouldn't he be rather brazen about a possible prison sentence?"

"He might, but Darrow was no seasoned criminal," Simpson returned. "In a good many ways he was just a kid." The big man sighed. "But he's not a kid any longer."

"Bitter, is he?"

"I can't give a name to the thing that's in Jimmie Darrow's soul now," he said presently. "He isn't bitter. He isn't resentful. But he isn't glad to be free. There seems to be neither hope nor despair. He didn't ask me about his wife, though he must have known that I would have been keeping an eye on her to see how she was making it.

"He wouldn't tell me his plans. He was more like a frozen man than anything else, if you know what I mean. He might as well have worn a mask for all I could gather from his expression. He wouldn't answer a question."

"How about Crane?" asked Blair.

"Oh, Crane is still a regular crook! He'll be into something again, as soon as he

can get himself established. One thing: he's afraid of Darrow. That's perfectly natural. He's afraid Darrow will *get* him.

"I tried to sound Darrow on Crane, too, but I didn't get anywhere with that, either. I expected he'd at least be bitter toward Crane, but he only let his lips curl a little when I mentioned Crane's name."

"Of course Darrow and Crane weren't doing business alone," Blair said. "Did you get any line on the rest of the gang?"

"Not definitely," Simpson answered. "We followed a good many clews that led us to Chicago, Denver, and St. Louis, but they never came to anything. We ran through the underworlds of those cities, following the slightest leads we could get, but the leads always played out. Of course when a thing like this happens you can hear talk everywhere. Saloonkeepers and bartenders and waiters that want to stand in with the police are always ready to hand out a lot of guff.

"It looked for a while as if some big crooks were behind the thing, and as if they had planned a raid on our road. There were one or two station jobs, but they didn't pan out very big. Since Darrow and Crane went to the pen we've had comparative quiet."

"Might that not look as if Darrow was the leader of a gang?" Blair asked. "If he was in prison, the gang might go to pieces. Had you thought of that? They may get busy again now that Darrow is free."

"I had thought of that," Simpson said, "but it doesn't seem possible. Jimmie had been as straight as a string except for the few nights just prior to the wreck. He was always home when he was off duty. He seemed to have settled down to become the most respectable of family men."

"Which might have been a bluff," said Blair. "It would all depend upon how deep he was. Is he clever?"

"I wouldn't call him clever exactly," Simpson replied. "But he's a far thinker and as unafraid as any man ever is. He's a good man physically; fine scrapper; not especially big, but he's one of these wiry customers. I had begun to depend upon him a good deal."

"Had he ever done anything worth while for you?"

"Not any one thing," said Simpson. "But taken altogether, his work was good. For a while the road was infested with hoboos. They swarmed like bees. Jimmie did as much as any of us to get rid of them. He had several fights with them when it was a toss-up whether he was coming through alive. But he never lost his nerve."

"Did his wife know that he had been in prison when he was younger?"

"At first she said it was a silly story. Then after that one visit to Jimmie at the pen, she wouldn't talk about it. In fact, she wouldn't talk about anything that concerned Jimmie."

"You don't suppose she knew all along that he was a crook?"

"I don't suppose anything of the kind," Simpson said rather acidly. "I'll bank on her. If you knew her as I know her you would understand that she's all right. She's good. I rather expected her to stick by Jimmie even after that story came out. A natural thing for a woman like her to do. I've puzzled a good deal over her dropping him cold the way she did. I suppose she has had some deep thoughts about the whole business, but if she has, she has never expressed them to anybody. She just kept right at her Morse and holds her peace."

"Do you think Darrow will bother her now?"

"He'd better not," he said; then added: "I'm getting off here."

"He's more concerned with the happiness of the puzzling auburn-haired lady than he is with anything else," the super said to himself as he watched the man leave. "I didn't suppose he had any sentiment in him. And I've never heard him talk so much."

CHAPTER II.

SIMPSON'S LARGE EVENING.

HIS bedside telephone was in the midst of its ringing when Simpson rolled over, stretched forth a big arm, and took up the instrument.

"Hello!" He was wide awake.

"Ballard talking. Been a robbery over at Quincy. Safe blown open and operator has a bullet in him."

"All right." Simpson hung up the receiver.

In an incredibly short time he was backing his car out of the garage. He sped down the street, turned into the boulevard, and headed for Quincy, fifteen miles east.

He had been thinking a great deal about Darrow and Crane ever since his visit to the penitentiary. He had been baffled by Darrow's participation in the former attempted robbery. He had never been able to find a satisfactory reason why Darrow had risked the happiness, so lately come to him, in an attempt to enrich himself by crime. If Rose Darrow had been a different sort of woman he could have found a reason, but she was not.

After he had left Blair, Simpson had given orders that if anything happened, day or night, he was to be notified immediately. He had a curious feeling that he was not through with Crane and Darrow. This call in the night had not surprised him.

In a short time he saw the lights of Quincy ahead of him. As he reached the village he turned down a road which bisected it and came to the tracks. On the station platform he saw a group of men.

He jumped from the car and hurried to the station door. The men crowded about him as he pushed his way among them and entered the station. The light in the waiting room had been lit, and the night operator, stripped to the waist, was sitting under it. A doctor was dressing a wound in his chest.

"How bad?" Simpson asked.

"Flesh wound," the doctor answered. "Bullet just grazed him."

"How'd it happen, Wheeler?" he asked the operator.

"I was sitting at the table reading a magazine when a man appeared at the window," the operator answered. "He poked a gun through the window and told me to stick up my hands. I did. He told me to keep them up and come outside. I couldn't do anything but obey. Another man came into the station from the platform. While

the first man kept me covered, the second one went into the office and blew the safe.

"When they were making their getaway I ran toward the door of the office. One of them turned at the outer door and blazed away at me. When I saw his arm go up, I jumped, but the bullet got me across the chest. I notified the yard office first thing, and then I called a doctor."

"What sort of looking men were they?" Simpson asked.

"They had their faces covered, so I couldn't see them," the operator answered. "But one of them was a big man, almost as big as you. The other was as tall as the first, but slender."

Simpson had half hoped, half feared, that one of the men would correspond to a description of Darrow—but neither of them did.

He went into the office and began to examine the safe. The operator, his wound dressed, followed him, and stood looking over his shoulder, as he stooped in front of the safe.

Suddenly the operator straightened up, with an exclamation. Simpson looked up.

"There's another!" the operator said.

"Another what?" Simpson asked.

"Robbery. Crawfordsville is reporting it."

"Get is," Simpson ordered.

"Safe blown open by two men," the operator read from the sounder. "Both got away."

"How long since this thing happened here?" Simpson asked.

"It was at twelve fifteen," the operator said. "It's one fifteen now. Just an hour ago."

"How did those fellows make their getaway?"

"I give it up. I didn't hear them arrive and I didn't hear them leave. The first I knew they were here was when that fellow stuck his gun through the window. I was out of commission for a few minutes after I felt that bullet crease me."

"All right," Simpson said. "Call Ballard at the yard office and tell him to have Bright and Colby meet me in Crawfordsville at once. I wish you'd call up some of the people you know in this town, and

find out if any of them have heard an auto since midnight. Let me know at Crawfordsville. No doubt the same men did both jobs. They must have had a car."

"All right, sir."

Simpson went back to the machine and headed for Crawfordsville at top speed. He found the same situation as had confronted him at Quincy, except that the operator had been more discreet, and so had escaped injury. This operator had not heard the men arrive, and had not taken the chance of watching to see how they had left.

"What'd they look like?" Simpson asked.

"They were young fellows, not very tall, rather slender. The one that told me to put up my hands had a peculiar voice. It was more like a woman's voice than a man's, a kind of a soft, purring voice."

"Neither Crane nor Darrow," said Simpson to himself.

An examination of the safe yielded nothing. It had been blown in the customary way. He turned away from it and saw the operator walk over to one of his instruments. He opened the key and answered his call.

"Ballard wants to speak to you," he said.

"All right," Simpson answered.

The operator told the other office that Simpson was waiting, and closed his key. The sounder rattled for a minute. The operator looked up with a grin on his face.

"This is your large evening, Silent," he said. "The safe at Hughes has been blown."

Simpson looked at his watch. Hughes was the next station east.

"Thirty-five will be here in a minute, won't she?" he asked.

"She's been right on the dot all night."

"Ask the dispatcher if you may drop your block on her," Simpson said. "Telephone around and see if you can get any trace of those fellows. And watch my car."

"All right," the operator said.

The passenger train slowed down, and Simpson boarded it, explaining the situation to the conductor as an apology for stopping the train.

Hughes was a mill town of forty thousand inhabitants. It was one of the most important way stations on the division. Here the safe-crackers had picked bigger game than at Quincy and Crawfordsville.

There was no essential difference between the methods employed here and the other places. But there was a little more for Simpson to work on. The operator had run to the door of the waiting-room the minute the men had disappeared through it. He had seen them running down the track. They had disappeared beyond a string of cars on a siding.

The operator was able to describe the gunman in detail. Simpson's eyes glowed when he had finished.

"That's Crane," he told himself. "And I have no doubt the other one is Darrow."

"See if you can get the chief of police on the phone," he told the operator.

"Oh, I got him long ago," the operator said. "I told him just what had happened and which way those geezers went. He said he would throw a string of men around the town."

"I'm going up the track," said Simpson. "If you hear from the chief, find out what he has learned. I'll be back presently. If Bright shows up at Crawfordsville, have him come over here right away. Tell him to get a machine if necessary."

He went out to the track and walked down it in the direction the operator had indicated. Earlier the sky had been overcast, but the clouds were breaking now, and the moon was showing through. Simpson walked along the track with bent head, looking for anything the men might have dropped in their flight.

He was not worried. His success had come to him through dogged persistence. He was a strong man, and it was his way to oppose his strength to what got in his way till finally he made it yield. But he was saddened. He felt in his heart that Darrow had been with Crane. If that were true, Darrow's scorn of Crane was pretense. Doubtless they had made up their differences and had framed elaborate plans while they were in prison.

Another suspicion had been creeping into Simpson's mind ever since he had left the

station. Portage, the station at which Rose Darrow was first-trick operator, was just east of this station. Its proximity might give a sinister meaning to Darrow's choice of Hughes for his first operation. He might have gone to Rose the moment he found himself free. She might have hidden him till he was ready to strike. The suspicion was so hideous that Simpson had been trying to put it out of his mind, but he had not succeeded.

His walk took him to the edge of town. There were a group of steel-mills here, their fires painting the sky. Spurs ran into their yards from the main tracks. Simpson could see men moving about before the fires.

He stood a moment, then turned to retrace his steps. Just as he did so he saw a uniformed policeman run out from the high board fence which surrounded the mill. The man was headed straight for him.

When the man came abreast of him Simpson called to him. The policeman threw a glance at him and padded on. Simpson ran after him. He stopped in front of a square building which housed the mill-offices, and began to bang on the door. There was no answer.

"Where in tarnation is that watchman?" he puffed.

Simpson stepped up to him.

"I'm chief of the A. and P. Police," he said. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Oh," the policeman said. "Well, you know the safe was blowed down at the station, don't you?"

"I just came from there," Simpson said.

"Well, I think I got one of your men," the policeman exulted. "The operator phoned that the men made off down the track, and our chief throwed us all out to make a dragnet. He caught me on the wire and told me to watch this district. I hot-footed over here, headed for the railroad. To make a short cut, I came along by the fence. Just before I got to the end of it, I stumbled over something and I stooped and put down my hand—right on a man's face!"

"Where is the man now?" Simpson asked.

"He's still layin' down there. I got a

coupla hunkies watching him. You needn't be afraid. He won't get away."

"I'd like to have a look at him," Simpson said.

"All right," the policeman said. "I'll lead you to him. I guess the watchman must be taking a vacation or maybe he's on his rounds some place. Come along."

In a moment Simpson made out two laborers standing just ahead of him. The policeman pushed them aside and Simpson saw a man, dressed all in dark clothing, lying on the ground.

Under Simpson's flashlight, the face was white and lifeless; there was a bruise just below the temple. The eyes were closed, and the man did not seem to be breathing.

It was Jimmie Darrow. Listening, Simpson found that the heart was beating steadily.

"He's all right," he said quietly. "Some one bumped him and put him out. He'll be coming round in a bit."

"If he ain't badly hurt I'll get the wagon for him," the policeman said. "Think he's one of the robbers?"

"He might be," Simpson admitted.

"Shall I run down to the next corner and phone for the wagon?"

"All right," said Simpson.

"You won't forget I caught him, will you?" the policeman asked.

Simpson said he would not forget. He was willing that the policeman should have all the credit. He was satisfied to stand in the background. If the suspicion that haunted him proved true, Rose Darrow would not thank him for nabbing Jimmie. But if it were true, it should not make any difference whether she thanked him or not. Yet, Simpson admitted with a sigh, it would make a difference.

He sent the two laborers back to their work, and stood looking down at Darrow. If the blow had not seriously injured him his period of unconsciousness must soon end.

Simpson bent down again and felt of his pulse. It was beating about as before. His flashlight disclosed that Darrow's color was now about normal. He took him by the shoulder and shook him violently.

"Hey, Darrow," he cried, "wake up!"

Darrow's eyes opened slowly. Simpson put his arms under him and drew him to his feet.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

Darrow put his hands before his face and swayed back and forth.

"See if you can move about a little," Simpson suggested. "It will steady you if you can make it."

Darrow walked away half a dozen paces and stepped back. He came close to Simpson. When he stopped, he was standing so that his right side was at Simpson's left.

Simpson did not notice the slow, careful contracting of Darrow's muscles. He did not notice that Darrow's right fist closed till it was a hard knot. But he felt that fist when it suddenly shot up and connected with his jaw. It was such a blow as he knew Darrow was perfectly capable of delivering.

While Simpson staggered back against the fence, Jimmie Darrow fled on soundless feet.

CHAPTER III.

MIKE LENDS A HELPING HAND.

SILENT SIMPSON was too big to be put out easily. A sudden, unusual rage helped him to keep his feet, too. It swept through him like a strong current.

He ran along the fence after Darrow, but his man was not in sight. Darrow was fleet of foot than himself, he bitterly reflected, and Darrow had taken a crook's precaution of padding his shoes or of wearing thick rubbers. Simpson remembered now that when he had run, he had made no sound on the packed slag in front of the fence.

"Well, he got me that trip—but never again," Simpson muttered. Whatever hidden liking he had had for Darrow died in him at that moment.

He went back to the spot at which the policeman had left him. Presently he heard the distant clang of the police wagon. The policeman came padding along the fence almost immediately. When he saw that Simpson was alone he stopped and stared blankly.

"Oh, he's gone," Simpson said, to get the unpleasantness over with as soon as possible. "He gave me a punch on the jaw and beat it."

"Well, of all the—" the policeman began, but his emotions were too profound, and he had to stop and stare at Simpson again. "You let him get away," he went on after a minute. "A big guy like you. Let him get away when you had him right in your mitt. Have you looked for him?"

"Certainly I've looked for him," Simpson returned petulantly. "But I didn't find him. You'd better get back to the wagon and have a new dragnet thrown out for him. It's the best we can do now."

The policeman was without further words. Shaking his head, he went slowly and sadly back to the wagon.

Simpson hastened to the tracks and returned to the station. He found that Bright had followed him in a car which he commandeered, leaving his assistant at the station to await further orders. He told the driver to take him to Portage.

At Portage he dismissed the car and went to Rose Darrow's cottage. The cottage stood at the edge of the village, where the country began. It was a quarter past three. He took up his station under a big tree across from the cottage and waited.

He was still standing there when dawn reddened the east, and when the street began to come to life a little later. At half past five Rose's mother came out to take in the milk bottle. Simpson waited fifteen minutes longer till smoke began to curl up from the kitchen chimney, and then he crossed the street and knocked on the kitchen door. Mrs. Thompson, Rose's mother, opened the door.

"Is Rose in?" Simpson asked.

"Why, yes, Joe," Mrs. Thompson answered. She looked at Simpson with an expression of anxiety. Then she stepped through the door and closed it behind her. "Has anything happened?" she asked. "Is it something about Jimmie?"

"Has Jimmie been here?" Simpson asked.

"Here?" Mrs. Thompson repeated, and her voice seemed to hold scorn. "Well, hardly. He'd better *not* come here."

In his time Simpson had listened to a good many protestations. That scorn in Mrs. Thompson's voice seemed to him not quite the real thing.

"I'll see Rose," he said.

"Come in, then," Mrs. Thompson said. He followed her into the kitchen. She called Rose, who looked at him coolly as he scanned her face.

He was not sure, but he believed that something had happened to Rose. There was an expression on her face that he had not seen there while her husband was in prison. She had had a kind of renewal of her beauty. It was, Simpson believed, exactly the look which would have been on her face if she and her husband had been reunited after a long separation. She seemed quite happy.

"I want to put a question to you," Simpson said, "and it'll be the only kind of question I know how to put: a plain, blunt one."

"What is it?" Rose asked.

She was standing directly across from him, holding herself erect, a challenge in her eyes. She reminded Simpson then of her father, whom Simpson had known as a man of steady nerves and brave heart.

"Have you seen Jimmie since he got out of prison?" Simpson asked.

There was a barely perceptible increase in the deep color in Rose's cheeks. She smiled.

"If I had seen him do you think I would tell you?" she asked.

"Why wouldn't you?"

"If I had seen him it would be because I wanted to see him," she said. "He wouldn't come near me unless he knew he was welcome. He isn't one to thrust himself on anybody unless they wanted him. You ought to know that. You knew him pretty well. He has pride, even if he is an ex-convict."

"You knew he was out of the pen?" Simpson questioned.

"Certainly I knew he was out."

Simpson saw that no amount of questioning would make her tell him anything. He tried another tack.

"I saw him last night, only a few hours ago," he said.

"Where?" the girl asked, and a sudden eagerness leaped into her face.

"In the mill yard over at Hughes," Simpson answered.

He saw he had pierced her armor. She was fighting hard to beat back her eagerness, but was only partially succeeding.

"You know I want to know what happened, Silent," she said. "Are you playing with me? Are you going to be a detective or are you going to be a human being?"

"There were three robberies on the road last night," Simpson said. "The last one was over at Hughes. Soon after it was committed a policeman found your husband lying in the mill yard. The policeman left your husband in my care. I tried to get him on his feet and he repaid me by giving me a smash on the jaw."

"Was he hurt?" Rose breathed.

"He had been put out," Simpson answered. "But I guess it hadn't been much of a blow. He was unconscious for a short time, probably was so when the policeman found him. When he came to he was guarded by two laborers, or, by myself, depending on when he came to. He lay still until he could take advantage of me."

"If he hadn't taken advantage of you, Silent, what would you have done with him?" she asked.

"I'd have locked him up on suspicion, of course."

"If you had been in his place would you have permitted yourself to be locked up on suspicion?"

Simpson gave her a look that was almost a glare.

"See here, Rose," he broke out. "You've puzzled me ever since Jimmie was convicted. You haven't acted natural. You haven't done any of the things I expected you'd do. I expected you'd either quit him or be loyal to him. You haven't done either. All the time he was shut up you never noticed him. You never wrote to him or went to see him except that once. I can't figure you out."

"You expected I'd be a quitter, did you, Silent?" she asked.

"I wouldn't expect you to remain tied up to a man that was serving time for robbery—or attempted robbery," he retorted.

"I stayed tied up, however," said Rose.

"Well, this isn't getting us anywhere," Simpson said. "Has Jimmie been here or hasn't he? I want a direct answer."

"You'll not get it."

He had expected her anger to match his own, but it did not. She was as cool as she had been all along.

"I'll tell you something, Silent, and I'm not admitting anything, either," she went on. "You're taking the detective pose that you read about. You had Jimmie sent to prison. Now that he has served his time, paid his debt to society as the law demands, you're convinced that he is a criminal for all time. If anything happens anywhere on this division in the next ten years you'll go looking for Jimmie, to see if you can't connect him up with it. I'm not defending him, but it seems to me, as lots of people have argued before, that this is the way to confirm a man in criminal tendencies."

"You admit that Jimmie has criminal tendencies, then," said Simpson.

"Admit?" the girl mocked him. "I wouldn't admit *anything* to you, Silent. You might lock *me* up on suspicion."

"I don't understand you, Rose," Simpson broke out angrily. "If I didn't know you pretty well; if you were not the daughter of one of the squarest men that ever lived, I'd say *you* were as bad as your husband."

"Maybe I am," Rose said.

She stood over by the door, facing Simpson, radiantly defiant, mocking, more beautiful than Simpson had ever seen her.

"Rose," said Simpson in a low voice, "I told your father, on his deathbed, that I would look after you and your mother the best I could. And I've tried to. I don't want any thanks for that. I'm just calling it to your attention. Can't you trust me? What's the use of your standing off like this and hindering me in the plain discharge of my duty?"

He had expected the plea to move the girl out of her stubbornness, but it did not. For an instant he thought it had. Her lips tightened as he mentioned her father's name, and the light died out of her eyes, leaving them sad. But she quickly took hold of herself. She smiled and the light leaped up again.

"I'm not hindering you, Silent," she said. "You know, you are usually a silent man. I have never heard you talk so much at one time as you have talked this morning. That silent habit of yours has helped to give you a reputation. I'm just trying to copy you. Really, you've dropped your mantle. I've picked it up."

"I'm talked out," Simpson said. "I'm going to search the house."

Rose cast down her eyes. She seemed to have a moment of deep thought. Simpson understood her mental processes. She was trying to remember whether there was anything in the house which Simpson should not see. Suddenly she flashed a smiling look at him.

"All right, Silent," she said. "Search as far as you like."

Simpson went into the room beyond the kitchen. He spent fifteen minutes in his search. It revealed nothing. Certainly Darrow was not in hiding anywhere on the premises.

He came back to the kitchen. Rose was not there.

"Where's Rose?" he demanded.

"Gone to work, of course," Mrs. Thompson said. "Since you took her husband away from her she has had to work. You know that, as well as I do."

"Has Darrow been here?" Simpson asked.

Mrs. Thompson did not look up. Simpson saw a smile curve the corner of her mouth.

"You asked me that before," she said.

"Rose told you to act this way, didn't she?" Simpson said angrily. "You are a puzzling pair of women, all right."

He stood looking about the room, unwilling to leave until he had discovered something. His eyes lighted on a brass smoking stand just beyond the kitchen stove. He remembered that stand as being one of Jimmie Darrow's most precious possessions. It had been a birthday gift from Rose soon after they were married. Simpson recalled that the last time he had seen the stand it had been in the sitting room.

Mrs. Thompson's back was still to him. He drew a cigar from his pocket and walked over to the stove to light a match. As

he lit it he glanced at the ash-tray of the stand. There were cigar ashes in it.

Simpson could not repress a little thrill of satisfaction. He had made a discovery, and he had to be glad of it, even though it incriminated Rose and her mother.

He could easily visualize what had taken place in the kitchen some time in the past night. Darrow had started a fire to get warm before going out on his adventure. He had sat by the kitchen stove and smoked a cigar. There were the ashes in the tray.

"Well, I'll be going," he said casually. "There's nothing to keep me here, I guess."

Mrs. Thompson glanced up at him quickly then. She knew that Simpson was one of the most pertinacious of men. When he was forced to let go of anything he did so reluctantly and slowly. He had come here convinced that he was going to discover something. Suddenly he had become satisfied, with no apparent reason.

Mrs. Thompson's glance swept the room as Simpson's had done. It rested on the smoking stand. She knew immediately what Simpson had discovered. But she only lowered her eyes swiftly and said:

"There is nothing here, Silent."

Simpson hurried back to the station. Rose was on duty. From the window he asked her if anything was due which would take him over to Hughes. The girl said there would be a westbound freight in a few minutes. Simpson had her drop the block on it, and as it slowed up he hopped on board.

At Hughes he found Bright still there, and another of his men, Colby.

He called them into the waiting room and told them what had happened.

"Both of you go over to Portage and get on the job," he said. "Don't lose sight of Mrs. Darrow when she is away from home. When she is at home watch the cottage. I have a notion that Darrow will be back there before long. Arrest him on sight. I'll be at the hotel here if anything turns up."

Simpson went to one of the hotels and turned in. He was not particularly pleased with himself for having set a watch on Rose, but there seemed no other way.

When Bright and Colby arrived at Por-

tage they left the train before it reached the station. They took up their places where they could keep both entrances to the station under observation.

At that time Rose was sitting in front of the telegraph table reading the morning paper from Hughes. It had an account of the three robberies.

Presently she put the paper aside and looked up. There had been a step in the waiting room. The door was opened and the section foreman came in. He stood a moment comparing his watch with the clock on the wall. Then he turned toward Rose and said with an exaggerated air of secrecy:

"Colby and Bright has been on the job for the past two hours, Miss Rose. Was that what you suspected?"

"Something like that, Mike," Rose answered. "You won't tell *anybody* that I had you watching for me, will you?"

"Not on me loife," Mike assured her.

He left, and Rose took up the paper again.

"Oh, Silent Simpson," she murmured, "two alert minions of the law to watch one poor, lone woman!"

CHAPTER IV.

MIKE TAKES A WALK.

A DISGRUNTLED Simpson sat in the smoker of the evening local train for Portage. For three days he had been trying unsuccessfully to get trace of the men who had blown the company's safes. He had started at Buffalo and had traveled to Chicago, Denver, and St. Louis. Crane had not been heard from.

He visited the places Darrow had frequented when he had had his lapse just before the train wreck, but nobody had seen Darrow or heard of him. Simpson had come to the conclusion that Crane and Darrow were still somewhere along the A. and P., getting ready for more deviltry.

Every morning, wherever he had been, Simpson had had a wire from Colby. There had been nothing to report. Rose was going about her business during the day and remaining home at night. Darrow had not appeared at the cottage.

When he had got back to headquarters that afternoon Simpson had found a message from Blair awaiting him. Blair, when Simpson appeared in response to the message, wanted to know of developments. Simpson had had to report that there was none.

"Have you seen Darrow?" Blair had asked.

Simpson had had to tell the story of Darrow's escape.

"Oh!" Blair had said.

The one little word had made Simpson uncomfortable. Like a great many young superintendents, Blair wanted quick results.

"Has Darrow seen his wife?" the superintendent asked.

"I think he has," Simpson answered, and he told Blair what he knew. "I've got two men on the job watching her," he added.

"If you get your hands on him again don't let him get away from you," Blair said. "From what you say I should infer that his wife knows where he is. Doubtless she knew he was in on that wreck. There's no chance you might want to shield her a little, is there, Simpson—for old times' sake?"

Simpson flushed. Nothing like that had ever been imputed to him before.

"I sent Darrow to the pen before, didn't I?" he asked.

"That's true," Blair conceded. "Well, keep going. We've got to get these fellows. Those safe robberies were probably just an overture. They'll be pulling off something big one of these nights."

That thought had been nagging Simpson all along. He was sure—had been sure from the first—that Crane and Darrow were not working alone. He was oppressed by a feeling that the road was the magnet drawing a bunch of high-class crooks. Watching Rose Darrow seemed to be a puny effort, if that were true, but it was the only definite thing he could do just yet.

At Portage he stepped from the train into a cold drizzle. He walked out to Rose's cottage, keeping on the opposite side of the street. He found Bright standing across from the cottage.

"I'm glad you've come," Bright said.

"There's been a man in the cottage for the last half hour. Colby is in the rear."

"Is it Darrow?" Simpson asked eagerly.

"We couldn't tell. He had on a raincoat, and a soft hat drawn down over his eyes. He went in without knocking. Colby wanted to hear what was said if he could, before we went in. He ought to be coming over here in a few minutes."

They awaited him in silence for what seemed a long time.

"They're sitting in the kitchen," Colby reported when finally he joined them, "but I can't hear what they're saying. The shades are drawn and I can't see, either. What do you want me to do, chief?"

"Go back where you were," Simpson said. "I'll go inside. Darrow may make a dash for it out the front or the rear door. Land him if you have to stop him with a shot."

Colby went back to his post. Simpson gave him two minutes, then crossed the road and went to the kitchen door. From inside the kitchen he could hear the indistinct sound of voices.

He rapped smartly on the door, prepared to throw it open if he heard any one making a hasty exit from the room. But there was only a step toward the door and it was opened. Rose stood framed in the light from within.

"I want to come in, Rose," Simpson said.

"Why, yes," Rose said. "Come right in. You must be wet."

Simpson stepped into the room. He looked beyond the stove to the spot where the smoking stand had stood. A man was sitting there.

He was an extremely bald man with a heavy growth of red whiskers. As Simpson looked at him he dropped the ashes from his cigar into the stand at his elbow.

"How do, Mr. Simpson," he said.

"How do, Mike," said Simpson.

"Won't you sit down, Silent?" Rose asked, a little too hospitably, Simpson thought.

Simpson was irritated. He had hoped to find Darrow in the kitchen. Mike was an anticlimax.

"Making a little evening call, are you, Mike?" he asked.

"I come for word of Jimmie Darrow," Mike answered. "He's a fine man, and I been wondering if he'd not show up at his old home."

"You were wondering that a few nights ago, weren't you?"

"I was," Mike said. "I was here a few nights ago to see if he had come. I sat right here and smoked a cigar as I'm doing now, but he didn't come."

Simpson did not answer him. The one clew that had indicated Darrow's presence in the house since his release was dissipated. He turned to Rose.

"Have you seen your husband since you've seen me?" he asked.

"My answer to that will have to be the same as it was when you were here last," Rose answered.

"Thank you." Simpson turned to the door.

"Would you like an umbrella?" Rose asked, following him.

"No," Simpson answered.

He went down the walk to the street. He was aware that Rose stood in the doorway till he reached it. He had a notion that she was peering about to see if he had company.

"She's a darned sight shrewder than I thought she was," Simpson complained to himself as he crossed over to Bright.

"What luck?" the man asked.

"None at all. The man in the house is Mike, the section foreman. He says he is making a little call to see if Darrow has come back. I'm going to trail him when he comes out. He's altogether too casual."

Fifteen minutes passed before Mike emerged from the cottage. He came to the street and set off toward the tracks without looking about him. Simpson picked up the trail. Mike struck off down the tracks in the direction of the mills.

The drizzle of rain and the overcast sky, as well as Mike's indifference, helped Simpson to follow him without being seen. Mike did not turn about. He walked steadily, with bent head, till he came to the mills. There he went directly to the mill office and entered. Through the window Simpson saw that the watchman was there. He and Mike seemed to drop at once into an amiable conversation.

Outside the rain increased. It beat down on Simpson till he was wet through. Muttering imprecations he stood and waited for the man to come out. Mike did so, along toward eleven o'clock.

He set off down the track, and Simpson followed him. He didn't quite understand what Mike was doing. It seemed unlikely that after his "call" on Rose and her mother he would walk in the rain to chat with the watchman.

But Mike seemed to be entirely satisfied with himself and seemed not to mind the rain. He plodded on, whistling a tune over and over. They came at length to a string of gondolas destined for the mills. The shadows of these took Mike, and Simpson followed him. He passed one car, and stopped. Something had moved between this first car and the one ahead of it. Simpson jerked out his automatic pistol.

Suspicion of Mike had flashed through his brain as soon as he saw that he was about to be ambushed, as he thought. Mike had been at the cottage for a definite purpose. He had lured Simpson to this out-of-the-way place so that some one—Darrow probably—might attack him. The idea came in flashes, taking no time.

There came a stab of flame from between the two cars, and a bullet sped past Simpson. He fired point blank at the spot from which the flame had leaped at him. There was an answering shot, and Simpson, still unhit, fired once more. Evidently he missed, for he saw something that was only a shadow in the other shadows dart out from between the cars.

"Stop or I'll shoot again," Simpson cried.

He had got out his flashlight with his free hand and turned it on. The light picked out a fleeing man. Simpson fired at him and he suddenly stopped and turned. A bullet sped too close to Simpson for comfort. He fired straight at the man's chest.

He saw the man begin to stoop at the instant he fired and then he saw him pitch forward on his face. He understood what had happened. The man had fired, had stooped to escape the return, but had not been quick enough, and had apparently got Simpson's bullet in his shoulder.

Simpson moved toward him, keeping the

light on him so that he could detect any move he made. He might not be as badly hurt as he pretended. As he reached the body he saw Mike returning along the track.

"What's up, Mr. Simpson?" Mike called.

"Stay where you are," Simpson ordered. "I'll attend to you in a minute."

As Simpson stood above him the injured man did not stir. Simpson turned him over and put the light on his face.

"Well, Crane, I got you, didn't I?" Simpson said.

"You got me," Crane answered in a low voice. "Take me some place where a doctor can look at me. I'm bleeding."

Simpson's examination showed that the bullet had gone through his shoulder. Simpson checked the flow of blood, then called Mike.

"Why did you lead me down here?" he asked sternly.

"Lead you down here?" Mike asked innocently. "I wasn't leadin' you no place. I was just down to visit Donohue for a minute before I turned in."

"You're pretty strong on visiting, aren't you?" Simpson said.

"It's a shame, it is!" Mike exploded. "Thirty years and more I've tended section on this road and never a mess have I been in. Who's this?"

"Don't you know him?"

Mike peered down at the upturned face.

"Never saw him in my life before," he said.

There was a ring of truth in his voice. Simpson had known him for a long time, and knew that his record was clear.

"Well, you run along and get a couple of your men and your hand car and come and get this fellow," Simpson ordered. "Show some speed now."

"I'll do that," Mike said, and he did. Simpson bent down to Crane.

"Come through," he said.

"About what?" Crane asked.

"Why did you try to get me?"

"Because you got me once. I'm just through serving my bit on your account, ain't I? Think I'd forget that?"

"Were you concerned in one of the robberies the other night?"

"I was not. I don't know anything about them."

"Where's Darrow?"

The crook's eyelids flew wide. There was a gleam in his eyes that did not deceive Simpson.

"I don't know where Darrow is now," Crane said. "But you lay for him, Simpson. You get him and you'll get the man that robbed them safes. I'm telling you something."

"How do you know that?"

"I'll tell you about it. Hold my head up a little. That's no better. Put it down. Now about Darrow and them safes. I—"

"You're stalling," Simpson interrupted him. "You took a minute there, just then, to frame a lie. I want the truth. Where is Darrow now? If you don't tell me the truth I'll throw you across the track and leave you there for the first train that comes along."

Crane stared up at him. Simpson's face glimmered cold and hard behind the flashlight.

"I believe you would, Simpson," Crane said. "I don't know where Darrow is."

"You're lying again," Simpson said. "Over on the track you go."

"All right, Simpson," Crane said. "You can murder me in cold blood that way if you want to. But I'm telling you the truth. I don't know where Darrow is. I haven't seen him since I left the pen."

"How did you know I was down here?" Simpson asked. "Is Mike working with you?"

"Mike? I don't know him. I followed you down to the mill and circled ahead of you when you started back. I knew you was looking east and west trying to get a line on me, and I picked you up when you got off the train and went to headquarters. I been trailin' you ever since."

That, too, was the truth, as Simpson perceived. He had done Mike an injustice.

"Crane, I learned in Chicago that there's a gang of you ready to raid our road," he said. "If you'll come through now, I'll see that nothing happens to you. If you don't come through, I'm going to drape you over the rails and let the first train cut you to bits. Who are you working for?"

"Nobody," Crane answered. "I've always worked for myself, and I always will."

"You're lying," Simpson growled. "I can tell you're lying by your voice."

"I'm giving you this straight, Simpson," said the crook.

There was a long blast from an engine's whistle.

"Hear that?" Simpson asked. "Tell me the truth or on the rails you go. The headlight won't pick you up till it's too late. I'll stand by to shoot you if you try to roll off the track. Tell me!"

"I'm working for myself," Crane said.

Simpson picked him up and laid him across the track. Down the track the headlight showed dimly. Simpson stood over Crane.

"Will you tell?" he asked.

"You can murder me if you like, Simpson," Crane said. "But I had nothing to do with those robberies and I'm not working with anybody."

As the light from the engine increased Simpson bent down and gathered Crane up in his arms. He put him down beside the track. As the train slid past them, he stood beside the track, swearing softly to himself.

"I knew you didn't have the nerve, you big stiff!" said the man on the ground.

But the rattle of the train drowned his voice before it reached Simpson's ears.

CHAPTER V.

SIMPSON GETS A LETTER.

THE train passed and Simpson stood waiting in the rain for the hand car to come. He heard it in a few minutes and it came into view only when it was a few feet from him. Three unrecognizable men in raincoats were at the handbars.

Simpson did not look at them closely. They said nothing. As he stooped over to pick up his prisoner he was hit on the back of the head, and fell forward against the car.

For just an instant he was dazed, as he had been when Darrow had struck him down at the mill. But again rage came to his rescue. His suspicions of Mike seemed confirmed and he determined to

make the section foreman pay for that blow. As he turned about he heard an unfamiliar voice say:

"Don't shoot. Smash him down. We heard that other shooting clear up by the crossing. We'll have the town on top of us first thing we know."

Simpson wheeled about as they made a rush for him, and seized the first man about the waist and crushed him to him. Then he hurled him back. He took a forward step to engage the other two men when out of the rain three more figures came. One of them Simpson recognized as Mike.

Simpson had a ferocious desire to get Mike then. He felt that Mike had made a fool of him. He thought he understood the game quite clearly. Mike had led him into this trap. He had purposely got him to this lonely spot so that he might be shot down. When he had captured Crane, Mike had gone for Crane's men. He forgot that he had dispatched Mike for the hand car.

As he struggled toward Mike, Mike sprang a fresh surprise, however. He aimed a blow at one of the three men. It caught the man below the ear. The man cried out and fell back.

The two others sprang to his side, leveling their guns at Simpson and Mike. Mike's men were standing back, waiting for orders from Mike as they always waited. One of the guns was pointed directly at Simpson's heart.

"Put up your hands," one of the men yelled. "I'll shoot you dead if you don't, Simpson. You know I'll do it, too. Put 'em up, I tell you!"

Simpson knew he would do it. With a sickish feeling in the pit of his stomach he put up his hands. Mike did likewise.

Silent in his anger, Simpson watched the men carry Crane to the hand car. He watched them climb up on the car with their burden. Two of them manned the bars while the third stood facing Simpson, a gun in each hand.

"Don't you stir," he warned. "I'll kill you if you do! Don't you stir till we make our getaway."

The car moved off in the rain. When it was out of sight, Simpson put down his hands.

"Where'd they come from, Mike?" he asked. "Quick!"

"My men was in bed," Mike answered. "They had to get some clothes on. They live just by the track. When I had routed them out I thought I might as well go to the station and find out about trains while I was waitin' for them. When I come back they was there, but the car was gone. I thought mebbe you had come up and got it. You are such an impatient man, Mr. Simpson. So I took my two men and come along down here. I done what I could, but it wasn't much. What's a man goin' to do when he is stackin' up against guns like that?"

"He's going to do about what we did, I guess," Simpson said. "Come on."

He drew himself up between two cars and jumped down on the other side, where there was a dirt road, Mike and his men after him. They ran toward the crossing.

As they neared the crossing they saw the light of an automobile. Simpson called to Mike to stay back while he ran toward the light. He was half a dozen rods from it when he heard the machine start. He ran faster. The machine pulled away. When Simpson reached the road it was across the tracks. Simpson began firing at it, but it sped out of sight without his bullets taking noticeable effect.

He ran to the station and told the operator to notify the police to look out for the machine. He had little hope of catching it, however, for it was headed for the open country.

He went out on the platform. As he reached it he saw a man running along the track toward him. Bright sprang up beside him a moment later.

"Mrs. Darrow left the house a while ago," Bright reported. "She went to a garage downtown and got a machine. Colby followed her in another machine."

"Who was driving her?" Simpson asked.

"She was driving herself."

Simpson stared down at him. Driving a car was an accomplishment which he didn't know Rose had.

"Where did she go?"

"Headed out toward the country, on the road running through the village."

"We'll go up there," Simpson said.

They went to the garage. Simpson routed out a sleepy mechanic. The mechanic verified Bright's statement.

"Does Mrs. Darrow often rent a car?" Simpson asked.

"She doesn't have to rent one," the man answered. "She owns her own car."

Simpson had to stare at him, too. He would not have been more astonished and perplexed if the man had said Rose owned a railroad. He knew her father had left a thousand dollars or so when he had died, but he didn't suppose Rose would invest that in a car. The money belonged to her mother, anyhow.

"How long has she had the car?" he asked.

"She brought it here one midnight about a month ago," the man said. "It's a new one. She's only had it out twice since then, but she can drive it all right."

Simpson and Bright went back to the street. Simpson fell into a study from which no questioning on Bright's part could rouse him.

They waited fifteen minutes and then a light showed down the road toward the station.

"A machine is coming," Bright said. "Two of them, in fact. I imagine it's the girl and Colby returning."

"If it is, you talk to her," Simpson ordered. "Find out what she's got to say about where she's been."

As the machine turned into the garage, Simpson saw that Mike was sitting beside Rose. The machine went on into the garage and Rose and Mike stepped down. Mike came out to the two men.

"Where have you been riding with Mrs. Darrow, Mike?" Bright asked.

"I was standing down by the track when she came along in her car," Mike answered. "She just picked me up."

Simpson scanned his face, but it was bland with innocence. Mike was altogether *too* bland, Simpson thought. He appeared to be very well satisfied with himself.

As Rose came out of the garage Colby drove up and stopped beside the three men.

"What happened?" Bright asked.

"Aw," Colby said disgustedly, "nothing.

She just drove around a mile square, with me trailing her. She didn't stop once."

Rose came up to Simpson, smiling. Simpson glared at her.

"What's the matter, Silent?" she asked. "Living up to your nickname at last, are you? You've talked more in the last few days than I ever heard you talk before."

Simpson sensed anxiety beneath her light tone. A kind of veil of dismay seemed to have dropped over her face. Simpson knew what was passing in her mind. She was afraid of him now that he had resumed his taciturnity. His silence had made many a crook worry, trying to guess what Simpson's next move was to be. He did not answer Rose now.

"Where have you been?" Bright asked.

"Taking a ride. I had a little headache. I needed the air."

"Where'd you get the car?"

"I bought it. Anybody can have a car these days. I've as much right as anybody else to own one, haven't I?"

"Did you expect to meet some one?" Bright asked.

The girl turned on Simpson, suddenly angry.

"Why do you stand there like a stone and let your man question me?" she demanded. "Why don't you do it yourself. You set these two men to watch me. I'm ashamed of you, Silent."

"Why don't you tell the truth, then?" Bright asked.

Rose turned a contemptuous look on Simpson, but he was not to be moved by it.

"I'll tell you the truth," she announced. "I knew the very minute that your two men came to watch me in the hope that I would meet my husband. I've known all along that you were watching my home. You thought I'd be taken unawares and go out to meet my husband and then you would know where he was and what he was doing. To-night I came out just to see if you would follow me. And you did. You're *awfully* clever, aren't you?"

She gave Simpson another look of scorn, and walked away down the street.

"Well, I'll be hittin' the hay," Mike remarked casually.

"Just a minute, Mike," Bright ordered.

Mike stopped. Bright took his arm.

"Mike," Bright said, "did you tip Mrs. Darrow off to the fact that we have been watching her?"

Mike had a judicial air as he considered that. He took his time about deciding what he should say.

"Since Mrs. Darrow has told you that she knows you been watchin' her, I don't know as it 'll make any difference if you have the whole of it!" he said. "Mrs. Darrow is a smart woman. Don't you think so, Mr. Simpson? Excuse me. I forgot you wasn't talkin'.

"Well, about a couple of years ago my old woman was took sick with the quinsy. A man like me ain't got any too many friends in a stuck-up town like this. So when Rose come in and done the dishes every day and made the woman comfortable, I didn't forget it. That's all the mystery there is about me helpin' Rose.

"Ain't it a gra-and mystery for a bunch of detectives to solve?" He was waxing eloquent and his quick temper was rising a little. "Rose come to me and she says she is suspicious that she will be watched. So she tells me to keep my eyes open. I do, and I see you and Colby the minute you landed here. I told her. She knew you'd be wantin' to know what she was doin' when she was off duty. So I snooped about her house and saw you men watchin' it. I reported that to her. That's what I was doin' in the kitchen when you found me there." He chuckled. "That an' smokin' a cigar that Rose gimme out of a box that Darrow left behind him when he went away. They was dry cigars, but good."

His chuckle rose to laughter and a gale of it swept him.

"Think of me sittin' there smokin' a cigar in Mrs. Darrow's kitchen and knockin' the ashes into that elegant tray. When it's all over, *remember* about me smokin' that cigar!" Then, seriously, "I'm goin' to hit the hay like I said," he added. "I'm a man that needs rest. If you want to stop me, stop me. If you don't, let me go."

He walked away and they did not stop him.

"What's so funny about his smoking a cigar?" Bright wondered.

Simpson puzzled that over for a moment and then he thought he understood it. He was sure, now, that his first notion about the cigar ashes was correct. Darrow *had* been in the kitchen that first night and had smoked a cigar, as Simpson had supposed. Mrs. Thompson had seen that he was suspicious of the ashes. She had told Rose. Rose had had Mike there in the kitchen on succeeding nights to smoke a cigar, knowing that sooner or later Simpson would come back to the house.

Rose and Mrs. Thompson were cleverer than Simpson had thought, and Mike was getting a good many free cigars.

And Rose was not going to lead them to Darrow. Apparently, she still had faith in her husband. She knew where he was, and she had been astute enough to discover that she was being watched. She had cashed in on the little service she had rendered Mike and his wife. She had taken a ride around a rural block to see if she would be followed. Simpson knew that she had checkmated him so far.

But what hurt him and puzzled him most was that Rose was still loyal to a man who had served two prison terms. He hadn't thought her that kind of a girl. If she still loved Darrow, why the deuce hadn't she visited him in prison, or at least written to him? Evidently she was playing a deep and far-sighted game—a game which had begun the moment the penitentiary doors closed on her husband.

"Well," he said stubbornly, breaking his silence at last, "you and Colby stay on the job here. We'll know what Mrs. Darrow does, at least."

He went to the hotel to get a room. As he registered, the clerk read his name.

"There's a letter for you, Mr. Simpson," the clerk said. "It came yesterday. Somebody must have been expecting you."

Simpson took the letter to his room with him and opened it. After he had read it he sat staring at the handwriting. It was a typical operator's fist. It might have been written by any one of many operators whom Simpson knew. It might have been written by Rose Darrow. He would have had to have a sample of her writing before him to be sure. Even with that, he might not

identify the writing. He was not an expert in that sort of thing. The letter itself was only another puzzle. It read:

Stay around Portage for a few days. At least, don't go farther away than Hughes. You'll hear from me before long. There is something doing—something big. You had better get about three more men on the job. Have them put up at the hotel here. Play the silent stuff from now on. You're doing fine.

"Hang around Portage, or Hughes, and get a bullet in my back some night," said Simpson to himself.

He rose and began to pace the floor. He was still pacing it when dawn came.

CHAPTER VI.

"NEVER!"

SIMPSON appeared at the station at half past seven the next morning, ten minutes before the westbound local was due. He went into the station and faced Rose through the window.

"How's Twenty-three?" he asked gruffly.

"O. T.," Rose answered. "Mad at me, Silent?" she asked appealingly.

"No-o," Simpson answered. "Only you're not the girl I thought you were."

"Why not?"

Simpson saw that she had a book of flimsy with a train order on the top sheet lying in front of her.

"Let me see that order," he said.

Rose hesitated just perceptibly and then brought the book to him. He studied her handwriting carefully. It was greatly similar to the handwriting in the letter he had received, but he could not be sure it was the same. Rose was one of the few girl operators who wrote the typical operator's fist. Simpson handed the book back to her.

"Have you got a new job, Silent?" she asked.

"Why?"

"I thought maybe they had appointed you inspector of train orders. Don't you think I throw a pretty good fist?"

"You throw a good fist all right," Simpson returned. "Can you write as well with a pen as you do with a stylus?"

"Better, I think," Rose said.

Simpson looked at her keenly. She met his gaze with level eyes.

"You didn't happen to write a letter to me, did you?" he asked.

"Why, Silent," she laughed, "I've seen you off and on for several days. I wouldn't dream of writing to you when I could tell you to your face whatever I had to say to you."

"I guess Twenty-three is coming," Simpson said.

He went outside. He wouldn't give her the satisfaction of questioning her about the letter because he knew he would get nothing from her, even if she had written it.

"Can you take it easy around the curve?" he asked the engineer when he had hopped up into the cab. "I want to jump down as soon as we get out of sight of the station."

"All right, Silent," the engineer said. "Got a hen on?"

"A setting hen with no eggs under her," Simpson said.

He jumped down beyond the west switch and walked over to a trolley line. On that he went to a village which was not on the railroad and spent the day there. At eight o'clock he was across the street from Rose's cottage.

He had expected to find Colby or Bright on watch, but neither of them was there. He waited a while, and then crossed the street and walked noiselessly to the rear of the cottage. Standing back, he could look through the kitchen window. Rose was in the kitchen. He saw, with a subdued exclamation of satisfaction, that she was dressed to go out.

He went back to the street and hastened to the garage where Rose kept her machine. He hired a car and told the proprietor that he wanted to follow Rose if she left in her car. The man nodded understandingly, and Simpson entered a car which had its curtains up and sank in the tonneau.

In ten minutes Rose came in and ordered her car. Simpson told himself disgustedly that anybody'd think she was a lady that had been used to ordering her car all her life. He wished he could figure out what had come over the girl.

As the lights of her machine were turned on he could see Rose's face. He had always known that she was a pretty girl, but he hadn't known that she was as pretty as all that. Her color was high and her eyes were shining like stars, as Simpson described them to himself. A smile curved her lips.

She ran the car out of the garage and turned north. Simpson's driver followed her at a discreet distance, his lights turned off. She took the road down which she had previously led Colby. They drove two miles, passing the first corner.

"Anyway," Simpson told himself, "she's going further than she did when she kidded Colby."

She went two miles further. They passed an occasional farmhouse, but for the most part there were only fields and woods along the way. Then suddenly Simpson's driver ground his car to a stop.

"She's stopped ahead of us," the man said. "There. Her lights have gone out."

"Wait here for me," Simpson directed. "Is there a village near here?"

"There's a tough little hole called King's Harbor about a mile up this road and another mile north," the driver answered. "It's where the lake boats put in. Mostly foreigners live there. It's the only wet town hereabouts and it's wetter than Noah's flood."

Simpson got down and walked along the road toward where Rose had stopped. In a minute he could see her car plainly and in a minute more he saw two figures beside it. He stepped into a ditch which ran alongside the road and went stealthily forward. He came up beside the car on the side opposite to the two persons.

One of them was Rose. The other was her husband.

Simpson felt a little glow of triumph run through him. He would have Darrow in his hands in a minute, and if he couldn't force the truth from Darrow he hoped Blair would fire him.

He stood listening with bent head to hear what Rose and Darrow were saying to each other. The car shut off his view of them. But if they had been talking they had suddenly stopped. There was no sound from beyond the car. Simpson waited in a pain-

ful silence, which seemed to him to last for a long time. He strained his ears to try to detect whether they were talking in whispers. But there was only that silence.

Then Rose's quick, even voice came to him, a little louder in tone than usual:

"Jimmie, set my car and I'll go back."

He heard Darrow climb into the car. He stepped cautiously back. He was well satisfied with this development. He would be glad enough to have Rose drive away and leave Darrow to him. He was likely to be a little rough with Darrow and he didn't want Rose there to see him administer his version of the third degree.

But as he stood there felicitating himself the car was suddenly started. Simpson thought at first that Darrow was going to turn it about. Before he realized that that was not Darrow's intention, the car had gathered speed and was scoting down the road. Simpson saw Rose turn toward him.

He began to run down the road yelling furiously to Darrow to stop. But Darrow did not stop. Simpson drew his revolver and fired once after the car, but he knew that his automatic would not carry to it now. He turned on Rose, white with rage.

"What do you mean by such conduct?" he demanded.

He stepped over to her as he spoke, and he saw that she was as white as death itself. Her lips quivered and there were tears on her lashes. Simpson ground his teeth in impotent fury. He couldn't abuse a tearful, frightened woman.

He gave her a moment to get herself together, and then he broke out:

"So you've been meeting your husband right along, haven't you?"

"I—I met him to-night, Silent," Rose said. "I heard some one come up on the other side of the car and I feared it was you or one of your men. I whispered to Jimmie to run away in the car."

"Where has he gone?" Simpson asked.

"Away," Rose answered.

"I guessed that," Simpson said. "Where is he hiding?"

Rose held up her head. He saw her color come creeping back. He had to admire her grit in spite of himself.

"You know it's no use to question me,

Silent," she said. "I won't answer any questions."

"Do you know that you become as guilty as your husband, by aiding him to escape?" he demanded. "I ought to arrest you. You ought to be locked up to keep you from any more mischief, and to make you talk."

"And put me in a cell?" Rose asked.

"In a cell," Simpson said.

"Don't do that, Silent," Rose said. "I'd die."

"I'll do it unless you talk," Simpson threatened, thinking he might so frighten her that she would talk.

She searched his face with eyes out of which all the life seemed to have gone. He could see that her quick mind was picturing herself sitting in a barred cell.

"Very well, Silent," she said. "Lock me up if you want to. I'll never answer your questions. You can torture me if you want to, but I'll never betray my husband."

Simpson looked at her for a long moment. He saw that it was taking all her strength to keep her resolution firm, but he knew that she would keep it so. The ordeal might drain her physical courage to the last drop, but her moral courage would still overflow.

"You make me sick," he said bitterly. "It's too condemned bad that you didn't marry a real man. A woman like you! How are you going to get back to town? I have a car back here a ways, but I don't suppose you would condescend to ride in it."

"My car is just up the road a piece, Silent," she said. "I don't want to leave it standing here all night. Somebody would steal it. Would you mind walking up there with me? This is a lonely place. I'm afraid."

"Oh, there's something you're afraid of, is there?" Simpson asked. He looked at her again with narrowed eyes. So Darrow had used the car to go only a short distance. That would indicate that his hiding place was not far away. This was strengthened by the fact that he had apparently come on foot to meet Rose. "My car is just back here," he said. "We can get it and drive along to where your car is."

Rose assented to that and they walked

back along the road. Rose tried to engage him in talk, but she saw that his silence had come to him again. He would not waste a monosyllable on her.

He ordered his driver to go along the road till he found Rose's car. When they reached it, he helped her into it.

"I'd be glad if you'd ride with me, Silent," she said.

Simpson climbed into the other car without a word. Rose sat silent for a moment, waiting to see what he was going to do.

"Oh," she said, "you want me to go?"

She seemed to debate what she should do, and then she turned her car and drove slowly toward town.

"Take me to within a half mile of King's Harbor," Simpson growled to the driver. "Let me down then and go back to your garage. If anybody asks you where I went you haven't the least idea. Get me?"

"I had you before you spoke," the driver replied flippantly. "I've heard about you the last few days. Compared to me on a business trip, you'd talk yourself to death in an hour and a half."

"I hope I would," Simpson said.

The driver set him down at the point he had designated. As Simpson paid him the man said:

"If you are going to King's Harbor looking for trouble, you'll be able to find it with your eyes shut. Sole leather is a planked whitefish compared to the toughness of them gents over there. Off duty, they don't do nothing but drink and fight—with knives, too. On duty, they count the minutes till they'll be off so's they can start something."

"If a crook wanted to hide down here where would he be likely to go?" Simpson asked.

"If I was putting a little bet for any place to show, I'd put it down on Slim Lally's," the driver answered. "Slim's a crook himself. Served his time twice. He's a slender, hot-eyed gink, a straight-whiskey drinker and a cigarette fiend. If you go starting anything in his place he's liable to lock the doors and see that you get your money's worth."

"Much obliged," Simpson said and plodded off toward the lights of King's Harbor.

It looked the part the driver had assigned to it among tough villages. There was a row of stores on the crest of a hill, and a road dropped down to the waterfront. Simpson could see steamers down there, waiting to be unloaded of their cargoes of ore from up the lakes. The big unloading machinery stood out against the night sky.

Simpson went down the hill. On the way he passed several saloons, but the name of Lally was not on any of them. He came then to a street that fronted the docks. Every other building seemed to house a saloon. On the opposite side there was a high fence that shut off a spur from the railroad.

A street light burned at the foot of the hill. Another showed at what Simpson supposed was the foot of a second hill. Between there was no illumination except such as came from the store and saloon windows.

He walked slowly along the street. Men fitting the driver's description lounged in doorways. Most of them were still in their working clothes, which were stained brick color from ore-dust. They favored Simpson with glances of hostile interest.

Simpson came at last to the end of the block. He looked at the sign of the corner saloon. In the dim light he could just make out "Lally's Place."

From inside the saloon there came the sound of rough revelry. A phonograph was grinding out tin-pan music. Raucous voices shouted a chorus now and then. Feet shuffled. There was loud talk.

Simpson glanced up and down the street. He took his pistol from an inside pocket and put it into the outer right-hand pocket of his coat.

Then he opened the door of Slim Lally's place and stepped inside.

CHAPTER VII.

SIMPSON'S POCKET IS PICKED.

THE long barroom was filled with drinkers. At first glance it seemed to be an assemblage of workmen. Most of them wore ore-stained clothing.

Some of them had dinner pails in their hands, or had put them on the bar in front of them. There were three other men that interested Simpson more particularly.

One of these he recognized as Slim Lally, from the driver's description. Lally had evidently advanced to his usual stage of intoxication for that time of the evening. A cigarette drooped from his thin lips. He was listening without attention to what a couple of dock laborers were saying to him.

As Simpson entered, Lally glanced at him with a quick, dark eye. The glance hung on Simpson's face for a moment, took in his big, well-dressed body, and then slipped away. But Simpson knew that in that brief glance Lally had marked him for a stranger and a man unaccustomed to visiting a place like this. Lally never overlooked the advent of a stranger in his saloon. It was his business to know who came and went.

Simpson walked up to the bar and ordered a bottle of beer. He was practically a teetotaler, but he had to make a bluff here. If he did not do so Lally's suspicions would be aroused at once.

As he pretended to drink, he saw Lally glance over his shoulder at a man who was leaning against the wall. In the mirror, back of the bar, Simpson could see the man answer the glance. Simpson sipped his beer and waited. In a few minutes the man against the wall edged up to the bar. He passed back of Simpson. The men who had been standing on either side of Simpson edged up closer to him so that he scarcely had room to move his elbows. He took no notice of this.

The man walked along the line of drinkers, then came slowly back. As he did so Simpson drew out his small automatic, that was easily concealed in his hand. He shoved the hand under his other elbow and leaned against the bar.

The crook stopped behind him.

"Gimme a match, Eddie," he said.

The bartender took matches from the back bar and handed them to him between Simpson and the man next to Simpson. Simpson felt the crook press against him. There was the feathery touch of swift fingers going through his pockets. He felt his

wallet slipped out of his hip pocket. The man stepped back with empty hands and took up his place against the wall.

Simpson finished his beer and went to the door. His manner betrayed nothing. Neither Lally nor the crook seemed to be paying any attention to him. Simpson went outside.

He saw what the game was. Lally's place was naturally always under suspicion. Complacent local officials let it run undisturbed, but Federal agents had to be dealt with. Any stranger might be a Federal agent. Lally had wanted to know about Simpson, and he had had his pocket picked to see if his wallet contained papers. If there was only money in it Lally would be that much the richer. If Simpson made an outcry there would be a moment of confusion and the crook would escape. There would have been nothing to incriminate Lally, whether Simpson was an officer or a plain citizen.

Simpson turned the corner and walked up the street till he came to the darkest spot. Making sure he was not observed, he crossed over and came back along the high fence. When he stopped he was across the road from the side entrance to Lally's. The darkness against the black background of the big fence completely hid him.

As he had expected, the pickpocket came to the side door in a moment, passed through it, and closed it behind him. He stood peering and listening, then started up the street. Lally wanted to know where Simpson had gone. In Simpson's wallet there had been company letters revealing his identity. Lally naturally wanted to know what this railroad policeman was looking for.

As it was, Simpson had the advantage, and shadowed the crook. His feet made no sound in the soft dirt. Startled by the sound of the sudden footsteps the man turned about; Simpson gathered him in his big arms. After a moment Simpson let go, but kept a hand in his collar.

"One word from you," Simpson growled, "and I'll knock your face into your back hair. That plain enough? Just make one peep and I'll let you have it."

He showed the pistol he had in his hand.

"You're going to walk up the hill," he said. "This little gun will be about one foot from the center of the small of your back. I'll bore you through if you make a sound or a move to run. Get me?"

The crook was an apt pupil. He made no sound. He only nodded as he stood there motionless.

"Where's my wallet?" Simpson demanded.

The crook put an unsteady hand into his pocket and drew out the wallet. Simpson took it and restored it to its proper place.

"Go on up the hill now and cross the street," he ordered. "Stand in the lee of that brick store over there. It's closed and nobody seems to be about. Answer the questions I put to you as fast as I put them. If anybody happens along stop talking and don't make a sign. Understand?"

The crook turned and went up the hill. He stopped at the spot which Simpson had indicated.

"Now get ready to loosen the hinge of your tongue," Simpson said. "All your remarks are to be right to the point. What's your business—what line are you in?"

"You saw how I took your wallet?" the crook said.

Simpson reached out and took the crook's windpipe between his long forefinger and his thumb. He pressed sharply and let go. The pressure made the crook writhe.

"I'm a pickpocket," he said.

"That's better," Simpson commented. "Ever do any yegg work?"

"No. Too hard for me."

"Very well. That fits all right. I believe you so far. Have there been any strangers at Lally's recently?"

"Five of them. Gunmen from Chi. They got something on. Don't know what it is. If they find out I squealed they'll kill me. They're the real thing. Big men. Go heeled always."

"Tell me what they look like," Simpson ordered. "Right down to the way their eyelashes curl."

The crook painted a word picture worthy of a cleverer man.

"Listen to this description," Simpson said. "Tell me if you have seen this man."

He described Crane minutely. The crook shook his head.

"Don't know him. Never saw him in my life that I can remember."

Simpson leaned to him and his eyes glared into the crook's. The crook shivered before the menace he saw there.

"That's the truth," he said.

"Listen to this one, then," Simpson said. "It's more important than the other."

He gave him a description of Darrow. He gave it slowly, and the crook followed him word by word. The crook was keen enough to understand that this was the climax of Simpson's questioning. If he could give a satisfactory answer, Simpson would doubtless set him free. He had a large experience with policemen and he knew that when they were on the trail of one crook, other crooks who did not interfere, were comparatively safe for the moment. The crook had only one ambition now. That was to get away from the big man whose fingers were so astonishingly strong.

"Gimme that again," he said when Simpson had finished.

Simpson repeated the description word by word.

"Uh-uh," the crook said when Simpson had finished, "that's the porter at Lally's place. Was the porter till this evening. He blew then."

Simpson's hand crept slowly toward the man's throat. He whimpered in fright.

"I'm telling you the truth," he whined. "He come there just a little bit ago. He had a minute's talk with Lally and Lally give him a job. He was just out of stir. He was white. He was a queer thing, always snoopin' around under foot. It was none of my business, though. I think he was hiding from you fellows. Ain't he the man you're after?"

"Did he seem to know the Chicago gunmen?" Simpson asked.

"He didn't know nobody. He didn't speak to nobody. Them Chicago guys wouldn't look at a cheap skate like him."

"Lally sent you after me to see if I took the car out of here, didn't he?" Simpson asked.

"I can't tell you nothing about what

Lally done," the man said. "Lally's bad medicine, and he finds out things."

"Well, just so that you'll be able to give him a report in detail you can walk over to the car line with me," Simpson said. "You can stay by me till I get on the car. Let's see if you have a gun."

He took from the crook a gun that matched his own.

"You might be so mad you'd take a shot at me as I boarded the car," Simpson said. "You could easily be back to Lally's under cover before a search was started."

The crook said nothing.

The car came in fifteen minutes and Simpson boarded it. The crook stood looking up at him with a hate-twisted face. Simpson waved him a farewell with an ironic smile on his face.

The smile faded as he sat down in the car. He believed the crook's story. But he could not understand why Darrow had been working in a place like Lally's in a menial position unless he thought Lally's was as good a place to hide as any. Certainly it was the last place a man would choose unless he was in Darrow's situation, as Simpson now had that situation pictured in his mind.

At Portage he went directly to Rose's cottage. Colby stepped out to meet him as he stopped under the big tree.

"Where in the world have you been, chief?" Colby asked.

"Where have you been?" Simpson demanded. "I was here to-night looking for you, and neither you nor Bright was on the job."

Colby stared at him.

"Why," he said in perplexity at last, "we went over to Hughes to meet you."

"Who told you to go to Hughes?"

"We got a message from you." Colby drew a crumpled sheet from his pocket.

"There it is," he added.

"It's too dark to read it," Simpson said. "How did you get it?"

"Why, Mike, the section foreman, brought it to us. He had just come from the station. The message seemed to be all regular. He said Mrs. Darrow had just got it."

"I didn't send you any message," Simp-

son said. "I haven't been to Hughes. Don't you or Bright leave here to-night. To-morrow evening meet me here."

"All right," Colby said, "but that message was all shipshape."

"That's all right," Simpson said.

He walked toward the tracks and stopped at Mike's house. The house was dark, but his insistent rapping brought Mike's wife to the door after a while. Simpson inquired for the section foreman.

"Well, he isn't to home," the woman said. "He hasn't been here all evening. I don't know where he is."

Simpson left. He thought Mike's absence was significant, since it was coincident with Darrow's leaving Lally's place.

He proceeded to the telegraph office and went inside.

"I wish you'd get hold of Hughes for me," he said.

The operator raised Hughes after a moment.

"Ask him to look through his files and see if there is a message there with my name on it—message I am supposed to have sent to Colby here this morning," Simpson directed.

The operator repeated the request. Hughes held the wire open for a minute. Then the sounder clicked.

"He says there isn't a thing," the operator reported. "He didn't have a message for anybody at Portage in yesterday's business."

"What's Hughes's call?" Simpson asked.

"H."

Simpson knew that the sending office call on the message was "H," and he was also sure that the writing was Rose's.

He sat down and wrote a message to two of his men at division headquarters, ordering them to meet him at Portage the next day. Then he went up to the hotel.

His plan was to assemble his men the next day and watch Slim Lally's saloon the next night. He could not be sure, of course, that the men at Lally's were the men he was after, but the presence of Darrow there was an indication, though it was a puzzle. He could only conjecture now that Darrow's acting as a porter was a stall. Why, in the security of Lally's, he should take a

job which exposed him was more than Simpson could figure out. But he was getting used to puzzles in this case. All he could do was to keep going.

At the hotel desk the clerk handed him another letter. He slipped it into his pocket and went to his room without looking at the envelope. In his room he took it out at once and he gasped when he saw this written in the left-hand upper corner: "If not delivered in five days return to James Darrow, Portage, Ohio."

He ripped the envelope open. It was brief and it was signed by Darrow's name. It read:

Get yourself set, Silent. You are doing fine. I will call you on the phone at the Portage Hotel some time to-morrow afternoon. There will be doings to-morrow night—*large ones*. If you have any fixed ideas in your head about me, get rid of them. I'm going to help you out.

"I'll give you credit for gall, anyway, Darrow," Simpson said as he folded up the letter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PILOT FROM LALLY'S.

SIMPSON called at the Portage telephone exchange the next morning, and gave the operator his official status.

"There will be a telephone call for me this afternoon," he said. "It will mean a lot to me if you can trace it back and find out the location of the party calling me. Will you?"

"I can find out, I think," the girl said. "I'll do what I can."

Simpson went back to the hotel. Two of his men, Cranston and Moorehouse, came in on the morning local. Colby and Bright showed up at noon. They reported that they had seen nothing of Rose since the day before, when she had quit work.

"She's not working to-day," Bright said. "A relief for her came in this morning. Looks like she had blown."

Simpson explained about the telephone message he was expecting.

"If we can find out from where Darrow is calling we'll nail him," he said. "You—

Bright and Colby—have a machine downstairs ready to hop into. You'll have to hit his trail fast if you get him."

"Maybe this is a stall," Bright said. "Maybe Darrow is keeping you here so that he will have you cooped up while he and his friends get busy."

"I thought of that," Simpson said. "But he wouldn't be calling me in the daytime if that was the case. He'd wait till dark. That's why I'm eager to see what he has to say. Of course his message may be the real stall. He will probably try to send us on a wild goose chase. That's why I want you to nab him."

At three o'clock that afternoon they were assembled in Simpson's room at the hotel. They were all as silent as Simpson habitually was. Simpson chewed moodily at a cigar. He could not help thinking of Rose Darrow. What he was going to do to Darrow would hurt her, but, confound it, he had to do his duty. Though she wouldn't believe it now, she would be better off when she was rid of Darrow again. Rose, driving around lonely country roads to meet a crook like Darrow! Darrow has hypnotized her.

The ringing of the telephone bell broke in on his thoughts.

"Here's your call," said the operator. "Your party is at Hughes."

"Foxy," said Simpson to himself; then to the girl, "Can you find out just where he is at Hughes?"

"He's at a drug store at Main and Center Streets," the girl said.

"How long can you hold him?" Simpson asked. "Can you keep him there and give me another line into the office of the chief of police there?"

"I can't keep him," the girl answered. "He said to make a direct connection and to tell you he would talk right now or not at all. He said if you were not on the wire in three minutes he would hang up the receiver and go away."

"Put him on," Simpson said. "Tell him I'm right here waiting." To himself he added: "I bet Rose is right at his elbow. That's a little *too* clever for Darrow. Leave it to a woman to dope out every little detail like that."

Darrow's voice—the voice he had been

longing to hear for days—boomed into his ear without any intervention from the exchange operator.

"Hello, Silent," said Darrow. "How do you feel this fine afternoon?"

"Cheerful, aren't you?" Simpson said.

"Haven't been quite so cheerful for a couple of years," Darrow said. "Things are just beginning to come my way. You know what they say about the well-known lane. Well, this has been the longest darn lane ever I saw, but the turn is right. Listen to me while I give you the dope."

"Go on," Simpson said; Darrow's gayety nettled him.

"A bunch of crooks are hanging around a saloon run by a man named Lally over at King's Harbor," Darrow proceeded. "There are three of them—gunmen from Chi. Toughest you ever ran up against. They and Crane have been working together. Crane is laid up, as you know."

"These three, and Crane, are the bunch that opened up the switch that landed me in the pen. When Crane was landed the three went West. They got into a jam in Illinois and went up for about the same time Crane and I did. When Crane and they got out they got together and came here. Crane has got it in for you, and they have started a raid in your territory. They pulled off the safe robberies. Now they're ready for the big noise. Want to hear about it?"

"I'm still here," Simpson said.

"They are going to be on board the Coast Limited to-night. When things are quiet along about midnight, when the Limited will be in the neighborhood of Portage, close enough to King's Harbor to be safe for them, they're going to stage a hold-up. They'll run through those sleepers like chain lightning, give the cord two pulls, stop the train, jump off in the dark, and beat it to King's Harbor. That's the dope, Silent."

Simpson stood a moment, saying nothing. He was racking his brains to discover some way to keep Darrow at the wire till he could get word to the Hughes police.

"Well, how about it?" Darrow asked at the end of a moment. "I'll ring off if you don't say something. I know you want to land me, but you can't. I'll be far from here before anybody can get to me."

"What do you want me to say?" Simpson asked.

"Do you believe what I've told you?"

"It sounds reasonable," Simpson said. "If it came from anybody else I'd believe it. I was over to Lally's myself last night, and I know a gang has been there."

"I was afraid from the way you were watching Rose that you might show up over there," Darrow said. "That's why I left. I had all the dope and there was nothing to keep me there—well, will you be on the Limited to-night?"

"Will you?" Simpson asked.

The circuit was suddenly broken. Darrow had hung up his receiver. He was evidently afraid that Simpson was playing for time. Simpson hung up his own receiver and quickly took it down.

"Connect me with the drug store where that call came from," he told the girl.

The connection was soon made.

"Did you notice the man who just made a long distance call there?" he asked.

"Yes," a man's voice answered.

"If he is still there hold him," Simpson said.

"He's gone," the man said. "A lady was waiting for him in a machine outside. They were off as fast as they could go the minute he stepped into the car."

Simpson identified himself.

"Can you give the police a description of the man, the woman, and the machine?" he asked.

"Not a very good one," the man answered. "It was a reg'lar machine. The woman had a veil on. The man was just an ordinary man. I didn't pay any attention—"

"Please do the best you can," Simpson said.

He hung up the receiver with no hope in his heart that Darrow would be caught. He explained Darrow's message to his men.

"It's simple enough," he said. "We'll have to watch Lally's to-night just as I planned. Two of you go there—Bright and Colby. If those fellows leave to get on board the Limited the trails will meet. Cranston, Moorehouse, and myself will be on board. If this is a bum steer that Darrow's giving us, you fellows will know what

the gang does. If they try to pull anything off, shoot them. Don't monkey with them for a minute. For some reason or other I'm inclined to think Darrow is giving me a straight tip. It may be that he has reformed and is trying to square himself. If you fellows finally get on board the Limited, come to the middle car. That will be the fourth car from the engine. Then we'll see what's doing."

At dusk they left the hotel. Bright and Colby went to King's Harbor in a machine. Simpson and the other two men, in a second machine, left for division headquarters. Simpson went to Blair's house first.

Blair, as Simpson well knew, was growing impatient of the lack of results. In his wallet Simpson had three telegrams from Blair with the terse question: "Anything new?"

Blair repeated the question now. Simpson laid the whole situation before him.

"What do you make of Darrow?" Blair asked.

"I don't make anything," Simpson replied. "I'm following two trails. I don't know what will happen. But I believe to-night will tell the story."

"If Darrow shows up you'll arrest him, won't you?"

"No. I'll give him rope. Darrow alone can't do anything. His arrest might stop the whole proceeding."

Blair sprang up.

"I'll go with you," he said. "Got reservations?"

"I stopped on the way and phoned for three—and an extra one," Simpson said dryly. "I thought you might want to go along. Do you ever pack a gun?"

"I have one in the house," Blair said. "A good automatic."

"Can you use it—quick?"

"I think so," Blair answered.

Blair's telegrams had rather riled Simpson. In other days his work had never been questioned. He had always got results where it was possible to get them. He had been allowed to proceed till he made his final report. There was a chance for failure here and he was glad to have Blair along, so that Blair would know what the failure issued from if there was one.

They went down to the big station.

"Are your reservations in the car the Limited picks up here?" Blair asked.

"No. There was room in one of the through cars and I got the reservations in that."

Simpson and Blair stood to one side and watched the passengers who were making their way through the gates to the sleeper which would be hitched to the rear end of the Limited. After a while Simpson nudged Blair's elbow.

"There goes Darrow," Simpson said quietly.

Blair started and stared after a man who was making his leisurely way across the tracks toward the sleeper at the far side of the train shed.

"It seems loose business to let him pass us like that," Blair said. "He may fool you yet. He certainly has his nerve to show up like this when he expects you will be here."

Simpson watched Darrow as Darrow climbed up into the sleeper. Darrow had not looked about to see if any one were watching him. He seemed only to be going about his own business.

"His appearance here indicates that he's on the level," Simpson said. "It's strange, but perhaps he wouldn't care if I arrested him now. If events occur as he phoned me he would be cleared. His wife may have convinced him that I would believe what he phoned me and would give him a chance to prove his sincerity."

"You think she gives you credit for brains enough to do just what you are doing?" Blair questioned.

"Something like that," Simpson assented.

"Oh, I haven't doubted your ability, Simpson," Blair said hurriedly. "Perhaps I was a little impatient."

"Let it go at that, then," Simpson said.

At half past ten all the passengers seemed to have got on board the Limited's cars. The train was due at eleven forty-five. None of the men who had passed through the gate corresponded to the men described by the crook from Slim Lally's. Simpson communicated this to Blair.

"The thing isn't dovetailing very well, then," Blair complained.

"If this is a stall to keep me off the trail till they can do some job they've planned, Colby and Bright will take care of them," Simpson said. "There aren't two better men in the country for a job like that. I wouldn't give two cents for those fellows' chances if they mix it with Bright and Colby, gunmen though they are. Both Bright and Colby can pull a gun and get it into action as quick as those old-time Westerners you read about."

Simpson looked at his watch. The Limited was due. He walked over to the board and found her marked up twenty minutes late.

"Wait a minute," he told Blair.

He ran up to the telegraph office.

"Is the Limited running late on orders?" he asked.

"No," the operator answered. "She'll make up that time all right in the next hundred miles."

Simpson went back to Blair. Cranston and Moorehouse edged up to them, but no word was spoken.

At twelve five the Limited pulled into the shed. The four men went out to her separately. They climbed up into the fourth car. As the heavy train started Simpson ordered Cranston and Moorehouse to go through the train, their search to include the picked-up sleeper.

They were back in ten minutes.

"There isn't a soul on board resembling the men we're looking for," Cranston reported, "unless, of course, they've gone to bed. Most of the berths are made up. Darrow is in the next car to the last, smoking a cigar. Wife's not on board, so far as I can find."

"Tricked, aren't we, Simpson?" Blair asked.

Simpson had no time to reply. As Blair had spoken the train had picked up her speed till she was hitting the high iron faster than she was scheduled, to make up the twenty minutes she had lost.

The train was now nearing Hughes. Outside Simpson could see the first of the glow from the mills lightening the sky. Suddenly two sharp blasts sounded from the engine's whistle. As Simpson felt the brakes slip on for a stop which was close to an

emergency, he ran to the door of the sleeper and stepped outside. The three other men remained in their seats.

Simpson leaned down and looked ahead. The train came to a standstill. Simpson saw a man spring up into the cab. Four other men boarded the first sleeper, two at the front end, two at the rear. The train started again.

Simpson reëntered the car and hurried up the aisle. He leaned down to Blair and the other two.

"We're into it right now," he said. "Get your guns handy. The engineer has picked up a pilot from Slim Lally's. Four of his friends are in the first car."

"And I'm right here," said a voice behind Simpson.

Simpson wheeled about. Jimmie Darrow stood at his elbow, a smile on his face, his right hand hidden beneath his coat, well up under the armpit.

CHAPTER IX.

ROSE IS APOLOGETIC.

"ARREST him," said Blair sharply.

"Just a minute," Simpson said. "Come quick with what you've got to say, Darrow."

"I'll do it," Darrow said. "I served my time in the pen unjustly. I had nothing to do with the opening of the switch that night. I was not associated with that gang. You railroaded me, Simpson. You wouldn't listen to what I said. I had got wind of this gang and I was traveling in the underworld to connect up with it. That's what made you suspicious in the first place when you came to look me up. I was in a fair way to land them when I was arrested. I was working alone because I had just been married and wanted to pull off something. I served my time, and my wife acted as if she had quit me. She did that because I had a plan and I wanted people to think I had been cast off by everybody."

"When I got out I went to see her. I'd have gone to see her if I'd known that I'd be caught at once if suspicion was roused against me again. I smoked a cigar in the kitchen. Simpson saw the ashes. He sus-

pected I'd been there. My wife and her mother had Mike smoke in the kitchen, too, to throw Simpson off the trail. It seemed to work fairly well. But I'll say for Simpson that he hung to his original idea. Mike's a good scout. We put him where he'd have an alibi to-night if this thing got balled up and he should be suspected.

"My wife bought a car out of what money I'd saved before I went to prison and what she saved while I was there. We had an idea that we might need a car for a getaway. That's how I got away when I did. My wife picked me up and drove me to Hughes, and then to headquarters. The night she met me on the road she had got Colby and Bright out of the way by giving them a fake message.

"When I got out of the pen I trailed Crane. I knew he was a crook, out and out. I knew he would strike straight for some hiding place where he could meet his old pals and plan something. His pals had been caught in Chicago when they blew from here, and sent to the pen for a job there. They got out a month ago.

"In my travels before I had visited Lally's place. I went to him, when I found the pursuit of Crane took me there, and Lally gave me a job, to cover me up. Crane showed at Lally's only once. I was safe in my job as porter. Crane and his pals met outside. I followed his pals from Lally's always. Lally wouldn't let them meet at his place. He was getting afraid. That's why he had you robbed, Simpson. These pals of Crane's planned the safe robberies and this one of the Limited in Lally's. I was hiding next to their room, and heard the plan. That's how I came to be able to tip it off to you, Simpson. You don't need to believe me. All you've got to do is to nab these men now."

"Well, if the train is being robbed, why are we sitting here?" Blair broke out. "We're losing time."

"You've got time enough," Darrow said coolly. "They're hardly through the first coach by now. They are making a complete clean-up of what the passengers have. You'll find the conductor and the porters neatly roped in that first car. It seems to be up to Simpson."

"Come on then," Simpson said. "Hadn't you better stay here, Mr. Blair."

"Hardly," Blair retorted. "I'm in."

"One little tip more," said Darrow. "These fellows are taking their time. They plan to finish the job by the time they get to Portage. Then they'll stop the train and hop off."

"How late are we now?" Simpson asked Blair.

Blair looked at his watch.

"Still twenty minutes," he answered.

"When I call to you give him a signal to increase speed," Simpson said. "Then cut the rope, so that those fellows can't give him a different signal. The signal will give those fellows something to think about, too. Now come on."

They hastened down the aisle past the curtained berths and came to the front end of the car. They stepped out into the vestibule and peered into the next car.

Simpson was in the lead. As they stood crowded close to each other, he saw a masked man start down the aisle of the car. In a moment two other men followed him. All of them had revolvers in their hands.

One of the men stood in the center of the aisle, looking toward the door. The others pushed the curtains aside on berths opposite each other. They thrust their revolvers ahead of them and leaned into the berths.

"Now," said Simpson to Blair.

He opened the door of the car and they pressed inside. Blair reached up and pulled the cord five times. At the same instant the two men withdrew their heads from behind the curtains.

Simpson raised his right hand and sent a bullet crashing toward the man. They saw him catch at his breast, sway, and sink down. Simpson strode along the aisle, seeking to take advantage of the momentary surprise of the two other men. They wheeled into the center of the aisle and fired almost together. Simpson and Darrow ducked before the bullets left the guns.

Behind him Simpson heard Cranston cry out. From his stooping position Simpson fired again. The bullet struck one of the men in the leg; he tried to fire again, but his leg gave way beneath him and he went down. The third man reached up to pull

the cord. When he found it disconnected, he turned and ran. Darrow and Simpson ran down the aisle, with Blair at their heels. Moorehouse remained to care for the wounded Cranston.

The man dashed out of the car and came to the next. He entered this as Simpson, Darrow, and Blair came to the front door of the other car. For a moment the man faced about, peering back at them. Then he fled down the aisle. Beyond him Simpson could see the fourth man standing in the middle of the car in a moment of paralysis. His companion called to him, and they both hurried down the aisle.

Simpson waited till they reached the end of it. As he expected, they turned there.

"Easy now," Simpson cautioned. "When I open the door, duck down."

He suddenly opened the door, and as suddenly closed it. The three of them crouched back of it. A bullet shattered the glass above them.

Simpson threw open the door again and entered the car. The robbers had disappeared. The three men ran down the aisle and came to the end of the car. Simpson put out his hand to open the door. There was a sudden grinding of the brakes on the car. Simpson was thrown against the door and the other men against him. The train slid to a stop as they recovered themselves.

"The man in the cab has made the engineer stop her," Darrow cried.

There was the sound of some one running behind them. Simpson looked back. A porter was at his elbow.

"Open that vestibule door," Simpson ordered. "Those fellows are getting away."

"Yes, sir," the porter said. "A passenger come runnin' back to my car and said there was a ruckus up here. I come to see."

They went into the vestibule, and the porter threw open the door. Simpson, Blair and Darrow jumped down. As they did so, they saw a man leap from the engine-cab. He disappeared along the engine and fled in the darkness. Simpson sent a shot after him.

Simpson heard a sound in the gravel fifteen feet from him at his left. He turned

toward the sound. There was a spurt of flame from directly in front of him. A bullet whizzed past him and buried itself in the side of the car. Then Darrow's gun spoke. There was a scream of agony and the sound of a falling body.

"Stand still a minute," Simpson ordered. "There's one of them left, remember."

They stood for a moment in rigid silence, but there was no further sound. Simpson walked over to the man whom Darrow had shot and bent over him, playing his flashlight in his face. He looked up at Simpson with terror in his eyes. He was one of the men the pickpocket had described.

"Where'd it get you?" Simpson asked.

"In the thigh," the man answered. "I hurt my knee when we jumped down. My pal beat it and left me."

"You're lucky you didn't get it any worse," Simpson said. "Darrow usually does a little better than that. But the light was poor. You know who I am, I guess. Have you seen anything of two of my men?"

"They were waiting for us outside of Lally's," the robber answered. "We gave them the slip. Had no time for rough work. They'd have got it good if we'd had time. We aim to entertain anybody that comes buttin' in at Lally's."

"I believe you," Simpson said grimly.

He looked at Darrow, who was standing at his shoulder.

"If they could give Colby and Bright the slip, they could give it to me," Simpson said. "If you hadn't tipped me off this afternoon I'd have fallen down on this job to-night."

"You had brains enough to take a tip, Silent," Darrow said. "Rose said you would have."

By now there was the usual confusion. Women were calling out in the cars in loud voices. Faces were pressed to the windows. Half-dressed men leaped down from the cars.

Simpson and Blair herded them back. The engineer came running up. He caught sight of Blair.

"I couldn't do anything," he said. "That fellow had a gun, and he said he'd blow our heads off if we didn't do what he

said. He was mystified by that signal. He got suspicious and told me to stop quick. I stopped."

"It's all right," Blair said. "Call in your flag and we'll be on our way."

The engineer went back to the engine. Simpson gathered the wounded man in his arms and bore him into the car. They carried him and the other wounded man into a smoking compartment and found a doctor on the train. Cranston was not badly hurt. He reported that the first man shot was past need of medical attention. Simpson turned the two wounded crooks over to Moorehouse and Cranston, after Cranston's wound had been dressed.

They went back to their seats.

"I don't suppose a train like the Limited could be stopped at Portage for a citizen of my reputation, could it?" Darrow asked. "My wife will be waiting for me there."

"I should think it could if Simpson would O. K. your request," said Blair.

"It's O. K.'d," Simpson said.

The conductor came up in a minute and Blair asked if the cord had been reconnected. The conductor said it had.

"Stop at Portage, then, to let off a distinguished passenger," Blair ordered.

He turned to Darrow.

"Look here, Darrow," he said. "I'm believing your story that you were innocent of association with these men before. But I've heard the whole yarn from Simpson. You had a prison record before this thing came up, didn't you?"

"Yes," Darrow said. His lips suddenly tightened. "I'll tell you, men—you especially, Simpson—that I'm no long-suffering martyr. If it hadn't been for my wife, Simpson, I'd have filled you full of lead the minute I got out of the pen. But as soon as I saw my wife again, that feeling died in me. That's why I went to see her first thing. I knew that's the way it'd be.

"I'm as square a man as there is in the world to-day, I do believe, and all on account of her. Oh, I was running all right when I first came here, but I don't know that I'd have kept it up if it hadn't been for her. I'd been pretty wild as a kid. I got into a jam in my home town. It was all my own fault. I needed money, as wild

kids always do, and I took an easy way of getting it. But I don't think I was really bad. I didn't figure what I was doing exactly, and I didn't know what the penalty would be. So there you are. I paid in one instance when I was guilty and in another when I wasn't. That ought to even my score. One thing I'll say: As I stand today I wouldn't harm anybody or anything. No matter what happens to me I'm running straight for my wife's sake. Do I have to pay again for that little slip I made when I was a kid?"

"I have forgotten it," said Blair.

"Your old job is open to you if you want it," said Simpson.

"I want it," Darrow said decidedly. "I want to begin where I left off."

The train was slowing down.

"We're coming to Portage, Darrow," Simpson said. "I suppose you'll want to leave us there."

"You're going to get off with me," Darrow said. "My wife made me promise that if I came through all right, I'd bring you to breakfast. She wants to apologize to you."

"Oh—" Simpson began.

"Go and get the apology, Simpson," Blair laughed. "I'll see that the rest of the details of this little matter are attended to. I'll make those fellows tell where Crane is and we'll get him. I rather enjoy this now."

When the train stopped Simpson and Darrow stepped down together. The train pulled out, leaving them standing on the platform. Darrow looked about. Down the road an automobile horn honked. They saw that a machine was standing there. Darrow ran to it.

When Simpson came up five minutes later, he found Rose Darrow still crying on her husband's shoulder. But she lifted her head proudly and looked at Simpson.

"What do you think of my husband now?" she asked.

Simpson said nothing.

"Oh, I suppose you're angry at me for doing the things I did," Rose said through her tears. "Well, I apologize for everything, Silent. I know my husband apolo-

gizes, too. Certainly he apologizes to you for striking you that night in the mill yard."

"Let me tell you about that mill yard stunt," Darrow said. "I haven't explained it and it's on my conscience. I hoped you'd all forget about it. I had followed Crane and another man that night. It was Crane and this man that robbed the safe at Hughes. I was on their trail when they fled through the mill yard. I was afraid of losing them and I got too close. They didn't know who I was, but they took no chances. They stopped suddenly in the dark and put the wallop on me. I was just coming to when that cop found me. He had heard about the robbery of the safe, and he suspected I had been in it. I knew I had to get away. I lay quiet as if I were still unconscious, waiting for an opening. That seemed to come when you and I were left alone, Simpson. And at the time, I was mighty glad to get a punch in on you for what you had done to me. And there you have it. I put everything I had in that kick. Of course I apologize for that, too."

"And I apologize for having Mike lead you down the tracks to the mill that other night," Rose said. "I had him do that because I wanted to meet Jimmie. I thought Bright and Colby might go with you."

Simpson still stood looking at them. His habitual silence seemed to have returned to him.

"Oh, come, Silent," Rose pleaded. "What're you feeling bad about?"

"I sent your husband to the penitentiary," Simpson said. "I guess I owe the biggest apology for that."

"That's over," Rose said. "We will forget it. We're tremendously happy—Why, Silent, you've talked more in the last few days than you talked in all the time I knew you before. Can't you be pleasant and say something nice to us now?"

A faint smile flitted over Simpson's face.

"What can a man do but talk when he is fighting a woman, as I have been fighting you?" he asked.

"Why," Rose cried, "Silent Simpson has made a joke! Get into the car and let me hurry you home, before you get over this mood."

(The end.)



East is East

Part II
by T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright."

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

JIMMY MILLION, young American entomologist in Algiers to study the destructive cotton boll weevil, falls in love with Aicha, a Moorish girl who is the ward and betrothed of Count Nalaczi, a native, when he sees her unveiled in the count's garden. The girl flirts with him, and he determines to see her again. He tells Judith Montfairly, a young English artist, of his romance, because he likes Judith as a pal and knows she will be sympathetic. Goombah, a black desert raider, gambles his wife, Zouic, against the count's Aicha, and loses. Meanwhile Feggy, a cockney guide, tries to hire Jimmy to get a certain jewel which the count owns. Jimmy's infatuation for Aicha places him in danger when he determines to investigate the count's ownership of the jewel and also when he angers Goombah. Goombah turns on him and threatens to kill him, and Jimmy knows that he has a strong rival for the affection of Aicha.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRE THAT DID NOT BURN.

WHEN Antoine, *garçon* of the *pension* DeLamare, gave Jimmy Million his cup of black coffee on the following morning, the American aroused in his bed and drank it with a confusion of questions in his brain. The hot drink crystallized his obsession from the mental mixture. He began thinking about Aicha, and then the cotton bales which had been removed from the garden wall. Why were they taken away? Had the big Japanese told Nalaczi of the intrusion into the garden? Or had Gwarli, that little devil of the blowpipe, reported him? Or, still worse, had Aicha herself asked the removal of the bales to prevent further violation of her privacy by outsiders?

He did not doubt that the disappearance

of the cotton was a kind of putting up bars against the attacks of vulgar Americans.

Jimmy winced. If there were only some way to tell the girl how accidental it all was—how innocent were his motives.

His mind trailed off into one of those long half awake reveries wherein all things happen with lovely and effortless certainty. He would go to Aicha and explain himself, and explain what he thought of the clausturation of women. And she would tell him her day dreams, there in the flower garden, and he would tell her how all his life he had hoped to meet some girl of stabbing beauty and be utterly melted for her. That her full lips and shadowy eyes, the modeling of her bosom, held for him the wistful passion of a raceme of aloe blossoms in the desert; that he loved her; he loved her before he ever saw her—

It is in a Southerner's temperament to

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intoxicate himself with words and fancies. Jimmy put down the cup, stiffened his arms, inhaled and tensed his chest, in a sort of writhing protest that he could not bring such a gush of poetry to pass. It was shameful that she should not know all his fine and chivalrous thoughts.

Antoine came out of the bath where he had laid out clothes and towels. Now he wiped his hand on his apron after testing the temperature of the water in the tub.

The passing of the *garçon* gave Million a cue for action.

"Antoine," he said, "just hand me the writing things on my desk—several sheets, please—that atlas will do to write on—thank you—er—by the way, Antoine, lot of native women over here in Algiers, ain't there?"

"That is true of any thickly populated country, *m'sieu'*," suggested the *garçon*, looking at his patron.

"Why, sure, yes, about half and half, I suppose," agreed Jimmy absently. "Most of the natives understand French, don't they, Antoine?" he inquired speculatively.

"The native women, *m'sieu'*?"

Jimmy nodded, grateful that long explanations were unnecessary with Antoine.

"The upper classes speak a very pure French, *m'sieu'*, and the lower at least can read it." Here he laid the writing materials on the bed.

"Thank you, Antoine."

"*Il n'y a pas de quoi, m'sieu'.*"

Jimmy kicked up his knee as a base for the atlas, touched his tongue to the tip of the fountain pen to set it going and addressed himself to French composition.

At the door Antoine hesitated and then apologized.

"I meant to tell you, *m'sieu'*, a gentleman was in to see you this morning. I told him you were out late last night and would awake in two hours."

"Quite right, turn him in if he comes back."

The *garçon* backed out with the ceremoniousness of his kind. Jimmy tested his pen's going qualities on a corner of his atlas, then stared out of the broad sixth-story window upon a sunlit view. He moistened the pen again.

It was always remarkable to Jimmy that he could think of such beautiful sentiments and expressions when he was half asleep, and yet he could not get them down on paper. The mere touch of his pen knotted the whole diaphanous fabric into hard little words that bore no resemblance to what he meant. He often thought but for this unfortunate mental trait he would have been a very great poet, indeed.

Now as he looked over Algiers Bay the demon of inarticulation seized him. He tried to remember the conversation with Aicha he had just imagined, but its tenderness and fervor had faded like the writing on a palimpsest.

A big Peninsula and Oriental steamer was just swinging inside the jetty of the outer harbor, and Jimmy watched that as he trailed his inspiration.

The steamer swung in slowly, and presently would swing out slowly, bearing away its casuals who, perhaps, would never return.

And then he fancied himself likewise being borne away from Aicha, never to see her again. The thought held such pathos, the young fellow blinked his eyes and drew a long breath. Then he began writing in English:

MLEE. AICHA:

I wish to apologize for my accidental intrusion into your garden yesterday. It was entirely accidental, and while I cannot feel very unhappy over seeing the prettiest girl I ever saw in all my life, still I want you to know I did not, and would not, do such a thing purposely. That's not like me at all, sure enough. I'm a Southern gentleman, I hope.

I wish there was some way to meet you personally and express my feeling toward you. I have thought of you a hundred times since I saw you. I wonder if you have given me a second thought. I know you have not. (This was a complete falsehood, but it seemed to write itself.) Is there no possible way for us to see each other, not even at dances—I never heard of such a country! Folks marry here the same as they do anywhere else, don't they?

I shall always think of you standing among the flowers, yourself a flower, Aicha. You were looking out over the sea, and somehow you seemed unhappy. Are you unhappy, Aicha? Oh, Aicha, it does seem so terrible that we can't meet. There is bound to be a way. Arrange it somehow. I have thought of nothing else but you. Right this minute

I am looking out on a steamship coming in, and pretty soon it will be going out. It makes me think of that hour when I will be sailing out of the harbor—alone? Oh, Aicha, how empty the sea and sky look when you are prisoned in walls!

Jimmy finished his letter with shaking fingers. The last lines were almost illegible. He folded and addressed it.

However, when he got out of bed, bathed and dressed, he reflected that sending a letter to a Moorish girl was not a simple matter of dropping it in the post. Letters to Moorish women might be censored—perhaps were. He held the envelope in his hand for several minutes and finally decided that Judith Montfairly could help him if help were possible.

He walked over to the telephone, called her number and after two clicking connections a cheerful voice called:

"Miss Montfairly speaking."

"This is Jimmy, Judith. I'm in a sort of pickle—what about writing notes?"

"Notes?"

"Yes, notes to persons. Must I put 'em in English, French, or Arabic?"

A pause. "Oh, you mean to *somebody*?"

"Sure, I do!"

"Well—just any of those languages, she—anybody can read it in any of those."

"You don't say so! Isn't that wonderful!"

"Not so uncommon over here," said the artist matter-of-factly; "they read French and English novels, you know—but that really isn't the question, Jimmy—this isn't America."

"I'd thought of that."

"Dreadfully improper."

"I've heard so."

"If you weren't a perfect dear of a boy, Jimmy, I wouldn't even talk to you about it."

Jimmy cleared his throat and grinned irrepressibly.

"Of course you don't want to drop anything in a letter box, or anything like that."

"I had my suspicions."

"Your suspicions are certainties."

"Then what am I to do?" asked Jimmy blankly.

A buzzing blank followed in the tele-

phone. Jimmy stood with receiver to ear waiting impatiently for more information.

"Hello, Judy!"

"Hello, Jimmy!"

"What you waiting for?"

"I was just thinking. Sometimes it takes me as high as two minutes to think up a plan to upset the social system of the Moors."

"Now you are getting sarcastic."

"Oh, no—suppose you come down to my place; maybe we can think up something together. Besides, I wanted you at three o'clock, anyway. I'm getting up a little sight-seeing party. Some friends off the Rajah—that's the big P. and O. liner that came in a while ago. She'll be in the harbor till morning. We want to show them a merry night. Shall I count on you?"

"Sure you can," agreed Million briskly.

"I saw that boat come in, and I was just thinking how it carried folks off, never to return."

"But these folk are coming in, Jimmy—if they were going off, never to return, they wouldn't put me to so much trouble."

"Yes, yes," admitted Jimmy vaguely. "I'll be around."

A few minutes after Million had finished this telephone conversation there came a tap at his door and Mr. Feggy entered, holding his greenish bowler in his hands.

Jimmy greeted him cheerily.

"Did you get hit, sir?" asked Feggy.

"Oh, no—"

"I saw you go into Count Nalaczi's—"

"Yes, but the jewel—whatever it is—wasn't for sale."

"Did you see w'ere it was located in 'is 'ouse, sir?"

"No. He started to show it to me; in fact, he started to give me the trinket—"

"Give it to you—"

"Yes, apparently he can't sell it, but in some way or other it's up to him to give it to the first person who asks him for it."

"Give hit!"

"That's what I said."

"'E really hofferred it to you, sir?" The little Englishman stared at Jimmy with a sagging mouth.

He was such a caricature of amazement that Million laughed. "Not only that, but

he must give it to the first person who asks him for it—"

"You can't mean," gasped the barker, "as 'ow 'e'd give hit to the likes o' me, sir, a man with no happroach w'atever, sir—"

"That's what I understood—you might call his hand."

Mr. Feggy twirled his greasy bowler nervously.

"Mr. Million, if only this isn't some 'ideous joke, sir—Hi think Hi'd best go now, sir—with that me and Major Peleurie could 'oist hour little plan, sir—I was talkin' to 'im—I'll go—" He gave Jimmy a sharp look. "W'y didn't you take hit yourself, sir?"

"Because I don't do that sort of thing," snapped Jimmy, his tolerance of Feggy coming to an end.

"Beg pardon, sir; don't get hignited at them as was not born gentlemen, sir. They can't 'elp it—I'll say good day, sir, and go."

After the fashion of subordinates, the little cockney had stayed close to his entrance and had kept the door partly ajar. Now as he swung it open a sudden plan popped into Jimmy's head.

"A moment, Feggy, will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, sir—wot is it?"

"Are you going to Nalaczi's?"

"Yes, sir."

Jimmy picked up his letter and considered it. He felt sure this squirming little man could deliver it if such a thing were possible, but he hardly knew whether to trust him with it or not.

"I have a friend living with Count Nalaczi—"

"Yes, sir."

"I want this letter delivered to my friend in person—to nobody else."

Feggy reached for it. "Yes, sir, wot's the lady's name, sir?"

The certainty with which Feggy had hit on the feminine sex annoyed Million. He stood hesitating. He positively disliked saying the name of Aicha in the cockney's dirty ear.

"Aicha."

"Ha-ee-cha." He spaced it slowly to remember it.

Jimmy made a nervous movement.

"Can't you leave off your damnable 'h's" for once in your life, Feggy?"

"Very good, sir."

"Bring that letter or its answer back to this room to-night, without fail."

"Very good, sir."

"Now what's the name?"

"Ha—"

"That 'll do. To-night. Good-by."

The cockney stowed the letter in some recess inside his mysterious coat, and with a final, "Very good, sir," hurried down the hall toward the automatic lift.

At three thirty that afternoon, when Jimmy Million reached Judith Montfairly's villa, a chatter as from an aviary floated through the open door, and before Jimmy got inside, rather a crowd came out of the house onto the bright boulevard.

With his mustache briskly upturned, Major Peleurie marched at the head of the procession entertaining a tall, bronze-haired woman of the Venetian type.

"It's the sort of thing everybody should see once," announced the *majeur* in his nervous, positive voice. "Otherwise, one never believes such reports. As far as that is concerned"—he shrugged—"when you do see it, you doubt it afterward."

"Is it ah posseeble?"

"Besides that, you must see it now or never. Such orgies will disappear when the Sahara becomes a lake."

"When the Sahara becomes ah what?" gasped the Italian woman.

"Now, *majeur*, *majeur*!" called some one in the party.

"You shall hear all. We must see more of each other, Mme. Minotti," confided the old officer in an intimate tone; "we are sympathetique."

A little to the rear of the *majeur* a tall, bony-faced American in a checked suit with a kodak strapped over his back was saying, "But one doesn't see these things at all. We are all hypnotized, you know—mass hypnotism."

"But I doesn't want to be hypnotized!" wailed a woman in a petted baby's voice. "I doesn't want to be—"

"As I understand it," interjected some one else, "we're not to believe anything we

see, smell, hear, feel, or have told to us—what can we trust?"

"My kodak," said the bony-faced man.

Lieutenant Mendier, bringing up the van, described to a squabby woman in a voluminous tourist coat:

"This Ibn Mulai is the mokaddam; that is, the religious leader. He sits out in the mountains somewhere, naked, rain or shine, cold or hot. It must be in a sort of trance."

"Trance—it's humbug!" decided a voice ahead.

"Certainly, it's humbug," agreed the woman in the big coat. "What would be the utility in freezing and baking naked?"

Mendier nodded gravely.

"When he could be making mother of pearl souvenirs to sell to tourists."

The woman in the coat glanced suspiciously at the young officer.

"Yes, he could," she said.

Miss Montfairly saw Jimmy on the boulevard awaiting the crowd from the Rajah. She hurried ahead and gave him her hand and a smile, then said in an intimate tone:

"I was afraid you weren't coming. I'm so excited about that—you know what."

"I've sent it on," said Jimmy in the same key.

"Not in the post!" gasped Judith.

"No—I'll tell you later."

She began circulating the late arrival among her guests. The crowd was in the middle of a discussion as to whether they should motor or walk to the place of the performance.

"What are we going to see, anyway?" asked Million curiously.

"The Aissaoui," stated the woman in the big coat positively.

"Haven't you seen them, Jimmy?" asked Judith. "Interesting and puzzling, but a little unnerving at times. Here, Anna, this is the Mr. Million I wrote you about. Jimmy, this is Miss Gagerly, a movie writer. It's getting so it's positively dangerous to risk your personality among strangers nowadays. The simplest school-girl may film you." She gave Jimmy to Miss Gagerly, and told the "movie" writer to show him to the rest of the crowd, as she hadn't their names yet.

The scenario writer was a pleasant, brown-eyed woman who looked a little tired. She sifted Million expertly through the P. and O. party which she had cascaded down on Judith. The bony-faced man in checks and kodak was a Professor Gad, who taught botany in a small Dakota college town. The squabby woman in the big tourist coat was a settlement worker with suffrage convictions. The professional baby asked Jimmy if he wasn't afraid to stay alone among the wild Moors, then supposed he was not, because "Oo look so big an' bwown an' strawn."

Mme. Minotti, the Italian woman with the Raphael school hair, was the ship's mystery. Miss Gagerly admitted to Jimmy that she meant to use her in a scenario, but hadn't decided just how.

On the walk to the mosque the woman in the tourist's coat put into scathing English her sentiments about a land that kept its women in private penitentiaries.

"Is femininity a crime?" she wanted to know. "Is it the original sin that a little over half the human beings come into the world already convicted of?"

"Believe me, *madame*," said Lieutenant Mendier, "you will never know how we French and Englishmen suffer on account of the walled-up Algerian girls."

Miss Gagerly laughed.

The reformer looked at the solemn face of the officer.

"You'd better emancipate your French girls first," she snapped.

The P. and O. party moved slowly because, *en route*, Professor Gad insisted on identifying all the tropical trees around the handsome villas that comprise Mustapha Superieur. When Lieutenant Mendier discovered the botanist's foible he began an argument about the exact species of every tree in sight. It sent the tall, bony man in checks bustling into private grounds, climbing palms to get some identifying tag that would put Mendier to rout. During one such performance the Arab owner came out. The crowd had much difficulty in explaining the matter. Mendier, the only person in the group who had fluent Arabic at his command, stood at the gate and listened.

A Mohammedan cemetery lay about halfway between Miss Montfairly's villa and the djamaa, or mosque, where the Aissaouin rites were to be given. It looked like a white miniature city of domes against the dark-green cypresses. Bright figures moved among the tombs, singing and laughing with the cadence of birds.

Mendier's brain conceived the sacrilegious idea of sending Mr. Gad botanizing among the tombs, so he began telling of an extraordinary species of cypress that flourished in the cemetery.

Mr. Gad said he would walk ahead rapidly, so as not to delay the crowd too much, and he was hurrying off when Miss Montfairly stopped him.

"They won't let you in, Mr. Gad," she called. "The Moslem women are in there unveiled. This is the Friday of Ramadan. The women all go to the cemetery to sing to the souls of the dead who return on that day."

"And this is their only holiday from their haiks?" asked Miss Gagerly.

Lieutenant Mendier nodded and smiled. The suffrage worker launched into renewed invective.

Million fixed his eyes on the calm, beautiful elevation of the dead. He wondered if he saw Aicha among those gay, colorful figures. The thought of the Moorish girl among the cypresses keeping even an imaginary tryst with the souls of the dead brought a faint distaste. What a rigorous partition of the sexes in this land of passionate sunshine—Africa, mother of impulse. The very sting of the sun on his neck brought a question into his mind could it ever be different. He looked at the girls in the cemetery in their brief freedom.

"Well," commented Miss Gagerly, who had the writer's trick of studying faces, "is this the burial scene in 'Hamlet'?"

The gate of the Moslem cemetery was proud with marble columns, and in their shadow was a beggar squatting on withered legs. When he saw the P. and O. crowd he seized two blocks, one in each hand, and came clacking toward the tourists. As the unfortunate held out a greasy hat and looked up, Jimmy saw the blinking eyes of

the blind. Rather a windfall of small coin fell to him, and the blind cripple seized his blocks again and clacked off into the cemetery to beg among the women.

Jimmy watched him disappear around a turn in the walk and wondered if he would be near Aicha. If the Moorish girl saw him Million knew that she would give him something, perhaps empty her purse. The American wished that he had given the wretch more.

Djamaa Safir in Mustapha Superieur is a small whitewashed mosque with regulation crescent-tipped dome and four slender minarets guarding the angles of its walls—quite commonplace except to strangers. By the time the tourists reached it daylight had faded until the sky was saffron, against which the dome sphered in a violet shade.

The boulevard leading to the mosque was sprinkled with robed pedestrians, Arabs on horses, negroes from the docks in nondescript bagging, gathering to the strange rites of the Aissaoui.

As the tourists entered the outer wall a steady stream of the faithful bathed their feet at the fountain and passed inside. An old Arab came forward and asked the westerners to wait a moment. He hurried inside and presently brought back an armful of great straw sandals. The sightseers slipped these over their shoes so that the floor of the djamaa might not be polluted.

The Arab collected a franc apiece.

A width of bare earth, patted smooth, lay between the outer wall and the side of the mosque. While his companions were being shod with straw Jimmy wandered along this open space around the corner of the building. The walls made a little cul-de-sac on the north side, and in this place sat two figures in conversation. They were two men, sitting face to face, talking in low tones.

The American had a fair view of one of the men. He had a bronzed æsthetic countenance in which glowed eyes of luminous black. But instead of exhibiting that subdued resignation characteristic of monks, this man's countenance suggested rather an intense and unearthly passion burning behind an imperturbable mask of bronze. Instinctively Jimmy knew that he was look-

ing at Ibn Mulai, the Mokaddam of the Aissaoui.

The man talked in a low tone to his single listener, who sat with his back to Jimmy. Occasionally the man, Ibn Mulai, made a slight gesture. As Million looked he felt an impulse to go closer and hear what the brown man was saying. He wondered what he was talking about so earnestly, this smoldering man.

Presently Ibn Mulai glanced up directly at Jimmy, who stood in the shadow of the wall. A queer vibration swept the youth, much as if some woman he had been pondering on a long time had suddenly looked him full in the eyes. He walked forward, quite without thinking what he was doing, and sat down beside the mokaddam's other listener.

The man Mulai was talking in Arabic, but somehow the guttural language seemed almost intelligible to Jimmy. The adept's barytone voice, his face and eyes and hands, conveyed a meaning concurrent with the unknown syllables and phrases.

It was a queer meaning. As Million stared into the face of the seer strange thoughts floated through his head. Curious reminiscences, unmarked moments of his life, came back to him with startling distinctness. Oddly enough, they were moments mostly of his boyish days.

He recalled a night's vigil during his early adolescence which he spent at the foot of a pine on his father's plantation in Arkansas. He had been lost in contemplation of the stars among the dark, feathery branches. It had seemed to him as if some marvelous arcana were among those mysterious lights into which he might tread along the night-blue sky; and he had been filled with a strange and wistful nostalgia.

Again he recalled pausing to gaze on sunsets when he drove the cows up from the pasture, and as the airy architecture changed and colored they seemed vast hieroglyphs whose meaning he was on the very brink of grasping. And the clouds had faded and had left him with tremulous lips staring into the ashy west.

They were meaningless moments which every adolescent has felt, and which usually vanish from the lives of westerners with-

out leaving even a memory. But now, listening to the murmur of an unknown tongue, they came back to Million with a sense of vague, indefinable loss, a withering, not so much an individual as a racial wastage. It was like a butterfly dying in its cocoon. He had grown up and specialized in cotton.

As the sun sank the muezzin broke in on the American's strange reverie, "Allah is God! Allah is God! There is no God save Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet!"

Million's two companions prostrated themselves toward the east, touching their foreheads to the ground. Then the three arose and walked around to the rapidly filling mosque.

At the door Miss Montfairly shuffled up to Jimmy in her straw sandals.

"Where have you been?" she began in an undertone, then after a look into his face she whispered in rather a blank undertone: "Why, Jimmy, have you been crying?"

There was a deep, almost maternal tenderness in her voice.

"Me!"

"Where did you pick up the count?" she asked, extending a cordial hand to the man beside the American.

Million glanced around, and was surprised, almost discomfited, to find he had been sitting, during this queer experience, beside Count Nalaczi. The fantastic thought came to Million that the man, Ibn Mulai, knew of the letter which he had tried to smuggle into the count's household.

Nalaczi, in his bidi, his jewels, with his strange, tortured face, now seemed more at discord with himself than Jimmy had ever seen him. The Moor in his finery made a sharp impression on the P. and O. party. There was a murmur of introductions.

The squabby reformer in the tourist's coat glared at the sallow satyr as if she held him personally and immediately responsible for the condition of women in Algiers.

Miss Gagerly's brown gaze traveled over every detail of Nalaczi's costume politely but eagerly, no doubt with an eye to screen effects. The adult infant pouted up at the Moor. "Doesn't it make oo shivery, these

tebble wites of the Aswee—but oo are such a gwater big man—” And she showed an inclination to creep inside his silken bur-noose and seek comfort during the terrible rites.

Miss Montfairly hoped the count's evening was open and that he would come along with her friends to the Café Moresque on the Boo' Republique. For even Judith was tempted to feature such a picturesque little lion.

The mosque was packed. A candelabrum hung down from the dark central dome and cast a pale circle of light over Kybeles, M'zabites, Turks, negroes, Sudanese, Arabs, who had come to see the ceremonies of the Aissaoui. A circular clearance some twelve feet wide was left in the middle of the crowd. There was no movement among the onlookers except the hushed infiltration of late comers easing their way into the mosque. But the very stillness of the turbans and fezzes, and white-ringed eyes intently watching the little central arena, betrayed the tension of the crowd. A smell of sweating negroes filtered into the air.

With a queer sense of premonition Jimmy thought of the man Ibn Mulai. As the press thickened, the P. and O. crowd was pressed forward into the shrinking circle. Million recalled some one saying the rites were unnerving; the strained staring of turbaned heads lent force to the observation. The mute excitement in the djamaa gradually increased. It reminded Jimmy of tightening the strings of a musical instrument. Jimmy braced himself against it. “These are just negroes,” he told himself.

Suddenly a clangor of drums and the shrilling of flutes filled the djamaa. The quick rhythm rocked the air and beat upon the crowd. It hammered endlessly. The dark audience seemed to vibrate to it, working toward something approaching hysteria. Its insistence teased at Million's nerves. It spread over him like a tangible something. The stench of dark, perspiring skins prickled in Jimmy's nostrils.

He tried to grip himself. “Damn it,” he thought, “these negroes can't really do anything remarkable.” He shrugged nervously.

The musicians were six robed figures squatting in the gloom of the north wall. They wove their bodies about to their snarling insistence. Just when the throb of the music grew intolerable the man Ibn Mulai moved into the open space.

The strange brown face again held the American. A monitory tremor overran Million's nerves. The mokaddam lifted a dark hand, there came a lull in the music, and he said something in Arabic. Lieutenant Mendier translated in an undertone for the Europeans:

“He says this is for our sins.”

Million stared at the brown man as through a mist. His foreboding as to what the man was about to do increased. He wished he had not come. He wished the man Ibn Mulai would cut short this sinister rite. He kept staring at the adept, and the thought “sin” persisted in his mind. He looked back over his own life, expecting to see, one might say, spots of sins, clear-cut transgressions. But it wasn't that way at all; it was rather a uniform dinginess.

His clandestine note to Aicha, certain affairs he never liked to think of, suddenly appeared much the same as all the rest of his existence. He would have done these particular acts at any time. Sin is a state, not an act. The conclusion amazed him. He stared at the man Ibn Mulai.

The clangor burst forth again. Two Arabs arose from the musicians. One had knives and skewers, and the other a covered brass basin, which seemed to contain something liquid.

The throng drew a long, shaken breath, as if about to receive some horrible pandering. The reek of human bodies grew stifling. The burning candelabrum added to the malodor.

Million divided his eyes between the mokaddam and the knives. The carved ivory handles fascinated him, and the reflections in the blue steel of the overhead lights, and the faint fur where the blades had been whetted.

The two helpers in dirty robes lowered their instruments and knelt before the man Ibn Mulai. Looking upward into the shadowy dome of the djamaa, the adept

spread his hands on their heads as if he forgave them what they were about to do. And it suddenly came to the entomologist that he, James Million, was one of the helpers, and that what they did was also his act, and that this man, whose mere voice had brought back the strange dead dreams of his boyhood, this man was also forgiving him.

The helper with the knife arose, applied its point to the man Mulai's neck, thrust it in deliberately up to its ivory hilt. Its point protruded from the other side. He left it sticking, a hideous thing.

A sickness ran through Million. Drums and flutes screamed and shuddered. The yellow light quivered. The other torturer pulled out one of the victim's cheeks and pinned it out with a skewer. The deformity was shocking. The American himself was sweating profusely. The stench from the negroes was so terrible that it seemed to bore up through Million's palate into his skull.

At least two dozen steels and knives lay on the floor. The torturers went over their victim with systematic horror. The man's face and neck and arms became dreadful *cheveux-de-frise*. He lost human resemblance. Only the turban and burnoose marked the man. Beyond that Jimmy saw only the outline of a head among the handles and protruding points.

The adept stood thus a moment. Then one of the helpers removed the cover of the basin, struck a match and lighted it. Instantly a brilliant white flame leaped up that reduced the candelabra to yellow glow and threw the press of dark, excited faces into weird chiaroscuro.

Into the dazzling fire the man Ibn Mulai leaned as if bathing. He plunged his head and torso deep into it. His turban and burnoose caught fire, leaped up in red flames and were gone. It left the adept's torso naked in the white blazes. Tongues of fire played around the impaling knives and spikes. The heat of the fire made Jimmy push back into the crowd.

After a minute of this sickening incineration, one of the ministrants clapped a cover on the basin. The fire was instantly extinguished. It left a moment of dazzled

gloom. Jimmy saw the two helpers jerking out the knives and skewers with a cloth and flinging them to the floor.

Disbelieving his own senses the American stooped to pick up a steel that fell near him. He dropped it and clapped his finger in his mouth. Around him on the floor of the djamaa drifted the ashes of the turban and burnoose.

The man Mulai stood looking at the crowd without a scar or burn or drop of blood on his naked torso.

Just then Million heard behind him the voice of Major Peleurie ordering with military curttness the natives to make way. The entomologist suddenly remembered the P. and O. crowd and looked around. The *majeur* and the lieutenant had Mme. Minotti in their arms, making their way toward the door of the mosque. The other women of the party were pale; some seemed on the verge of collapse.

The professional infant was babbling "tarry me out, tumbody," and was sidling over toward Professor Gad, who had become nervously busy with his kodak at this too late a moment. Jimmy looked for the mokaddam again, but he had disappeared.

At last the P. and O. party got clear of the mosque and stood gasping the cool, sweet air of the Algerian night.

"It is very plain," Professor Gad was saying, "the whole performance was mass hypnotism."

"Did you take the picture?" asked Miss Gagerly, shakily.

"I—I got one of the ashes."

But Count Nalaczi was really the center of the group. He was explaining to Miss Montfairly and the suffrage worker the difference between eastern and western ideals.

"The East despises the flesh, *madames*," he was saying; "we strive to conquer, to sublimate it; the West coddles or trains it—"

The automobiles at the artist's villa had followed the party to the mosque. Now, as every one climbed in, Jimmy heard the discussion still going. He caught the words, "illusion—legerdemain—fifth dimension—ecstasy—a miracle—catch penny—" And the crowd was off to dine at the Café Moresque in the Boo' Republique.

Jimmy lost himself in the gloom and turned back home. Under the first street lamp he looked at his finger-tips. They were blistered.

The Pension DeLamare lies on Rue ReJean off the Boulevard Bugeaud. Jimmy approached the junctures of these two thoroughfares lost in painful thought. That queer feeling of having reviewed his life and finding it soiled and unworthy persisted. He thought of Aicha and questioned himself why he desired her. Surely it was something finer than the mere placation of flesh. Surely, surely— He looked up at the powdered light of the Milky Way.

As Million stepped into Rue ReJean a hand caught his shoulder from behind. He whirled nervously and glimpsed a masked face. He swung for a blow when he recognized the tall form of Goombah Das in the gloom and stopped himself.

The Targui motioned him silently from the light into the shadow of a cork tree. The tree itself stood in the corner of a tropical lawn that was sweet with unseen flowers.

Jimmy followed the masked man silently until both were hidden in the darkness.

"Well, what is it?" asked Jimmy, deciding on the place to halt.

"Do you recall my words?" guttured the mask.

Jimmy recalled nothing that pointed to such a scene as this; however, he answered diplomatically, "Well, now, just exactly, what is it you want?"

"*M'sieu'*, I am ready to go."

"Where?" asked Jimmy curiously.

"To retake that which I delivered to *m'sieu'*, the count."

"The woman Zouie?" specified Million.

Goombah Das maintained an affirmative silence.

"Well, I—I—" Jimmy stared at the giant wondering just how he came into the matter. "Well, I wish you luck," he said at last.

"I should think you would, *m'sieu'*," observed the man from Ouarglum grimly.

"I do," said Jimmy.

"And you will come?" asked Goombah in his undertone. "Two are more powerful than one—"

"Me?" Jimmy felt a slight sinking sensation.

"You have the same stake as I, M. Million."

"You mean that I go and steal Aicha at the same time?" blurted the American in a queer tone.

"What else can a man do?" rumbled the Targui brusquely. "When a man sees a woman and desires her—Allah! Do you love for nothing? Are you a play actor drawing breaths and turning pale for sport?"

"No, I'm not that," retorted Million vaguely affronted, "but I don't know whether she—that is, the girl—cares a rap for me or not!"

The tall figure moved impatiently. "If she love you? Tchik! A woman loves whoever siezes her!"

Goombah Das's language sent a revulsion through Million. He felt ashamed of ever having entertained the notion.

"No, I won't go," he decided.

"You won't!"

"No."

"After I have told you my plans?"

"I didn't ask your plans—besides, I will keep them."

The Targui suddenly became calm again. "I know you will, *m'sieu'*. You followed me out of the Flying Fortune. You spied on my comings and goings, and now you will keep my secret very close, indeed—"

In the gloom the raider was quietly drawing something from his broad leathern belt.

A flush of danger swept over Million's body and made him feel curiously light and powerful. He was unarmed. He balanced himself on his toes for a kick at the giant's groin. Another second he would have launched it with the venom of a scared man when there came a sharp clacking just behind the two on the Boulevard Bugeaud.

Both men hesitated. Under the arclight clattered the figure of a cripple walking on two blocks which he held in his hands and drawing withered legs after him. Jimmy recognized the blind beggar he had seen at the cemetery gate.

The cripple paused under the street lamp, staring up and down the boulevard, then he called in a careful voice:

"Mr. Million! Oh, Mr. Million, sir!"

The voice was exceedingly familiar, but Jimmy could not place it. "Here I am," he said, staring at the creature.

The beggar shuffled into the shadow, laid down his blocks and worked briskly for a moment at his legs. Then to Jimmy's amazement he got himself up on his legs, slapping his thighs and bumping his numb feet on the ground. Suddenly Jimmy recognized him.

"Feggy!" he gasped in amazement. "Is that you, Feggy?"

"A trick I learned followin' the circus, sir," bobbed the little man obsequiously, "it 'as stood me in good stead 'ere and there, sir."

He fumbled in a greasy recess of the garment he wore and drew out a square of paper.

"A hanswer to your letter, Mr. Million, sir," he said.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERTED VILLA.

IN the shadow of the cork tree Mr. Feggy continued massaging his legs and stamping his feet while Jimmy Million broke open the envelope. It seemed incredible that this letter in his hand was really from the girl Aicha. It was as if a dream had solidified into flesh and blood.

A fragrance mounted to his nostrils from the torn paper. But for the bystanders he would have kissed the sheet. He walked into the edge of the light and began to read. The writing on the first page of the letter was carefully formed and slightly irregular, like a child's. Further down it grew erratic with the ardor of the message:

... Amiable Monsieur Million, oh, what delight for me to know one who cross my heart so many many times think also of me.

How badly I act, oh, Monsieur Million, to scream, to run, to hide my face in my hands, how gauche! Often when I read books, I think, when I see gentleman, I will to act simple like French and English girls, but no, I shriek like wild woman.

I am compose now, but my pen, she shakes as you see. If we could talk as you wish what would we not say?

Oh, I have wonder about you, Monsieur Million. I have been look out at sea and wonder what *navire* brought *monsieur* to sail over the edge of the world—and did I see him when she come. And since that day, *monsieur*, I never see a *navire* sail out of the harbor, but I wonder does she sail away with the *monsieur* who look in my garden?

Then to-day the mendicant give me the letter in the cemetery, asking me to fly. My head she go dizzy. It is so wonderful. I will be to-morrow night, kindest *monsieur*, in the garden where you see, when your shadow lies under your feet, ready to fly. To-night I cannot come. I have not clothes together. To-morrow night I have, and I do so. A poor woman will aid me, a poor woman to whom my heart is compassion. She is sadder than I am before you write.

Forgive these poor Anglaise. I could do more well with my composition book which are not here. I see the beggar coming. Till we meet, *monsieur*, by the desire of Allah, I am thy

AICHA.

Jimmy pressed the letter to his lips. "Well, I swear! I be—"

His brain was in a glow. She would meet him in the garden when the moon was overhead, ready to elope with him. He glanced across Algiers Bay to where a rising moon already streaked the sea. He began a rapid calculation. Then he noticed the Targui for the second time. He hurried to him joyfully.

"Goombah, it's all right, old top. Forget that little tiff we had. Best of friends must scrap, you know." He laughed joyously. "I'm with you to-morrow night without fail. It's all arranged." He held out his hand so spontaneously that the man he was about to fight took it.

"What time and where?" inquired Goombah in his heavy burr.

"It says when the shadow of the moon is underfoot," quoted Jimmy. "That's after midnight—Feggy. Where shall we meet?"

"I could 'ave a boat, sir, hoff the Esplanade Bab el Oued," returned the cockney promptly, as if he had already worked out the details of a raid on Count Nalaczi.

"You'll go along?" cried Jimmy.

"I 'ope I 'ave the 'onor, sir."

Jimmy grasped his hand irrepressibly. "Now, about that moon business. We'll have to look that up in the almanac to see just when she is overhead."

"When the moon is overhead it is overhead, *m'sieu*," gutturalled the tribesman.

"Well, there's something to that, too," admitted Jimmy, as if the idea were a novelty.

"But a boat, *m'sieu*," began Goombah Das. "Why a boat? I have horses."

"They'd make too much noise," declared Jimmy at once; "with a small boat we can ease into that garden like a shadow."

"But, *m'sieu*, I am no boatman. I live in the desert—"

"Look at me. I live in Arkansas," countered Jimmy cheerfully. "Never saw the ocean till the day I sailed from New York."

The tall figure stared seaward and shook his head. "M. Million, the sea has been unkind to my race. It is ever treacherous. Once a wise woman read my hand. 'Goombah Das,' she said, 'I see you riding a white horse through water. Beyond that lies the sword of Allah.'"

"You're not superstitious, are you?"

"Even a fool believes the wise, *m'sieu*."

The Targui's somber prophecy bridled Jimmy's enthusiasm somewhat.

"Anyway," he argued, "she warned you against a white horse. We're going in a boat, *Feggy*; just you get the darkest boat you can find; one that can't be seen at night. And, Goombah, if you don't want to ride in the boat say so, and I'll bring back both of the girls. Glad to do it for you."

"No," growled the Targui shortly, "if it is the will of Allah—"

"Oh, there'll be no danger at all. The sea's like a floor."

"At the Esplanade Bab el Oued," agreed the Targui gloomily.

"All right, see you both there when the moon—straight up—around two o'clock, I fancy. So-long, *Feggy*. Good-by, Goombah Das."

"*Abka la Kheir*," gutturalled the Targui, and the three men separated.

A hundred thoughts danced through Million's head concerning the ways and means of an elopement that had come upon him so intoxicatingly and so unexpectedly. He wondered how he could get his bride out of Algiers as quickly as possible. He wondered what recourse Count Nalaczi would

have, legal or personal revenge? The P. and O. steamer crossed his mind. If he could smuggle his bride aboard the *Rajah*!

The fragrant night conjured up a marvelous honeymoon at sea; Egypt, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and the languorous South Seas with Aicha. And then when he finished his trip around the world and returned with her to Lonoke, Arkansas—he began laughing to think what an impression her dazzlement would make on Lonoke.

He laughed, then smiled, then became grave at a thought that passed through his head—a bride from Africa—Algeria—but then Algeria was Africa. He shrugged his shoulders and turned briskly down the *rue*. He took off his helmet to the night breeze. His forehead burned as if he had a fever.

A motor purring along caught Jimmy's ear and he glanced around. The machine swerved into the pavement and came to a halt. Million stood looking at it absently.

"Is that you, Jimmy?" came a voice.

"Yes," he answered blankly.

His voice sounded so odd that the driver called out to him: "Jimmy, don't you know me?"

"Of course I do." Then Jimmy's brain slipped a cog and he made the great mistake of trying to force its hand by continuing, "You are—" And then the name eluded him completely. The woman's face was as familiar as his own reflection, but he thought only of girls back in Lonoke. "You are—"

"Jimmy, what on earth's the matter with you?" cried the woman in alarm. "We missed you from our party. I thought I would drive by and see what had become of you—you aren't ill?"

"Oh no, *Judy*," he assured her, the name popping into his head as suddenly as it had left him. "Where are the rest of the crowd?"

"Aboard the *Rajah*—she sails at midnight."

Million started. "What? What? At midnight! Good Lord, *Judy*, she mustn't sail at midnight—" He swung down into the car. "Here, drive me to the captain of the *Rajah* at once. I've got to get him to hold his boat!"

Miss Montfairly twisted about in alarm

and put her hands on his arm and shoulder. "Jimmy, what is the matter with you? You haven't been right all afternoon. You were crying at the mosque—what is it, Jimmy?" she mothered.

"I'm all right," protested Jimmy hurriedly. "I want to sail on the Rajah to-morrow night at two o'clock—"

Judith's hand slipped to Jimmy's head. "You have a fever, Jimmy."

Her voice was very tender.

"I know it, but take me to the wharf quick—Aicha and I are going to elope on the Rajah to-morrow night—"

"What! What? You and Aicha!" It was the woman's turn to be stricken.

"Yes, that's right!"

"You don't mean you have it—all arranged?"

"Sure I have—here's a letter from her." He began fumbling at an inside pocket. "Now you run me down to the wharf—"

Miss Montfairly stared at him in the slanting moonlight. "Well I've heard you Americans were— Listen, Jimmy, why do you think the Rajah would wait for you?" She started a patient search for any sane idea that lay at the root of his obsession.

"The Mississippi River steamers do it," explained the man from Arkansas simply. "When dad eloped with mother, the Robert E. Lee lay over thirty-eight hours at Vicksburg to get them, and grandfather chartered the Belle of Memphis to chase 'em. And it was some chase, believe me! The Robert E. Lee had an anvil on the safety valve and she looked like two Roman candles roaring down the river in front of a waterspout—split her wide open—you ought to hear dad tell about it—and the cap'n wouldn't take a cent. Naw, not a cent— Now Judy, honey, hurry—"

The Englishwoman understood perhaps a quarter of this lurid description, but she didn't have the hardness to point out the difference between the Mississippi River and the route from England to India.

"Jimmy," she said, "you haven't thought this over. It would never do to have the Rajah wait. The secret would leak out and your wedding would be nipped. Now the best thing for you to do is to put your bride aboard the night ex-

press, catch the Rajah at Tunis and not even ask her to wait here."

"That is a good scheme," admitted Jimmy after a moment's thought.

Miss Montfairly started her runabout.

"Let's run down to my place and work out the details," she proposed with rising excitement. "Really, Jimmy, you are so—so—I hope it ends happily—"

"Thank you, Judy—of course it will."

Planning a marriage throws any two friends, man and woman, into a most intimate *causerie*, almost as intimate as plotting a crime. Miss Montfairly's room was quiet and restful after Million's wretched and strident day. There was not a flower in it which was a pleasant change in this land of flowers. The only odor it held was the faint flattery of Chinese tea set forth in translucent cups under the sleeping light.

"After all," the hostess was saying, "I don't believe you would care for that sort of tour, Jimmy—neither would Aicha."

"Great trip!" declared Million.

"Yes, but every tourist on shipboard would refer to 'our bride and groom.' Awfully conspicuous. And then, you know, one really doesn't see anything on a wedding tour. One might as well stay where one is, or rather two is, or are—marriage confuses the verbs so."

"Then what can we do, Judy?"

"Run down to Biskra, get married before the subprefect, take camels and lose yourselves in the desert for a fortnight, reappear at Bougie or Djidjelly and continue your work in cotton down the African littoral. It would be a much simpler change for Aicha than to be thrown suddenly into mixed European society."

Jimmy nodded. He had not thought of the adventure from the girl's viewpoint.

"You can get a guide and a cook at Biskra, two camels and a camping outfit for a desert honeymoon—"

At the words "camels" and "desert honeymoon" the whole venture suddenly seemed very remote to Jimmy. The effect was heightened by Miss Montfairly's restful English room which banished Africa a thousand miles away. He tried to brush away this feeling and asked in a business-like tone:

"How do you get camels in Biskra—hire 'em from a camel livery stable?"

"You get them with the driver who owns them. They go together, the man and his animal. You may have to take a cart and donkey—that's a method of Sahara travel, too."

"That doesn't sound—"

"Oh, much too ordinary," agreed the artist.

"I mean it doesn't sound fast enough. I may be in a right big hurry when I get there, Judy," said the prospective groom with a serious smile. "No telling who will be behind me, or how close he'll be. When my father landed at Vicksburg on the Robert E. Lee, I think he had thirty minutes for the ceremony."

Miss Montfairly became thoughtful. She warmed Jimmy's tea and her own. The pouring showed a pretty curve in her forearm, which Jimmy was too occupied to notice.

"I meant to go to Biskra before long," she hazarded.

Jimmy nodded, not troubling for the connection.

"If I could get down there in time, I might rake together the camels and Arabs and camping outfit—" She smiled. "I might even have the subprefect waiting—"

"My dear Judy," laughed Jimmy, thinking again how queer and fanciful his undertaking was, "do you realize this affair is to be pulled off to-morrow night when the moon is—" He paused and did not finish his sentence. It seemed too slushily romantic to set the hour for an elopement by the position of the moon.

"Certainly I know," assured the artist, "but I can, as well as not, run down on the one thirty to-night. I'll be there in the morning. I'll have time to arrange everything."

Million stared at the girl.

"Why, Judy, I couldn't let you do that—couldn't think of it—I'll make Mendier go and do it. I'll see him this minute." Jimmy gulped his tea and started to arise. But Miss Montfairly got to her feet first.

"No, Jimmy. The night is the coolest time for traveling here. And I don't want Mendier in this. He—he's cynical, Jimmy,

and—and after you had gone, he—he would—would tell about you, Jimmy—" Miss Montfairly's cheeks warmed, but she looked very straight into Jimmy's eyes. "And I don't want you told about. Do you see?"

"But Judy—"

"No, I don't want him in this and I won't have him in this," she stated with an odd little note in her voice. "I'm going myself because I want to sketch. It won't be a bit of trouble, really. And if you don't get there, as you planned, I can use the whole outfit myself, for I want to do the Sahara anyway. There you are. Now I'll have to send you away if I'm to pack and catch the one thirty."

"But Judith!" gasped Jimmy, for she was actually chivvying him gently out of the house.

"Really I was going anyway. Night's the best time to travel. Really—" She stood in the doorway with one of his hands pressed in her warm little palms. "Good-by, till I see you at Biskra on your honeymoon."

"Good-by," echoed Jimmy blankly, and the thought of Biskra and honeymoon and camels seemed altogether dreamy and very far away as he stood looking into Miss Montfairly's friendly room with its intimacies and comfort and faint fragrance of tea.

At intervals all that night Jimmy Million's nerves brought him wide awake, and he stared out of his broad windows at the winking harbor lights with the uneasy thought that Judith Montfairly was speeding through a hostile desert on a mission for him. Then he would doze again and the events of the day would filter through his head in grotesque shapes.

The Aissaouins tortured him, Goombah Das was kidnaping Miss Montfairly, who seemed very lonely in the dream; now Feggy was sitting cross-legged in the mountains for the sins of the world because he—Jimmy Million—had stolen Miss Gagerly's scenario.

At each climax he struggled awake, perspiring, filled with a terrible anguish. He would shake this off and think by this hour to-morrow night he would be flying with

Aicha, and that Judith Montfairly was now somewhere out in the desert on his behest. The one was as fantastic as the other.

Million arose early next morning and began packing his bags and entomological paraphernalia. After he had buckled the last strap he thought of his revolver, and had to unbuckle three bags to find it. It was a .38 Colt. In Lonoke, Arkansas, this is considered as much a part of an eloper's outfit as the "At Home" cards. The American shoved his gun into his inside coat pocket and camouflaged its outline with a notebook. Not that he meant to use the revolver.

In Arkansas' elopements it is considered the height of bad taste to shoot up the wife's pursuing relations. Pistols are rather a form than anything else. But then, in Arkansas, the pursuit, too, is rather a form than anything else. In fact, if serious parental opposition is offered in Arkansas, a kind of reverse English elopement takes place.

Pursued by the lover, the father flies with his daughter far, far away, say across the Missouri line, and incarcerates his daughter in some Catholic female seminary, or with a maiden aunt. The lover fires, not pistols, but epistles, not at the father, but at his beloved. He seldom scores a bull's-eye. They are headed off by the mother superior, or by the maiden aunt, and the affair simmers down.

Oddly enough, the weight of the steel against Jimmy's ribs gave the first feeling of reality to the affair. Not that he had ever eloped before; but Jimmy was not a confirmed pistol toter, and the chafing impressed upon him the unusualness of his coming adventure.

When he had finished repacking he remained in his room for several minutes waiting for the day to elapse. Then he called Antoine for an almanac, tipped the *garçon* heavily and figured the precise number of hours until the moon should reach its zenith. He reduced these to minutes. There were nine hundred and seventy-two minutes. He drew out his watch and marked their ticking away, dropping one by one out of the Future into the Past. For the first time in his life Jimmy's excited

brain adumbrated the insoluble problem of Time. What was it, this curious moving hair-line boundary between the Past and the Future, which yet encompassed his whole existence? Time!

As far as Jimmy knew he was the first human soul who had ever posed for himself that question. He puzzled about it for perhaps a minute and a half, then decided he would ride downtown and hunt up Goombah or Feggy.

A dinky little Algerian tram picked him up at the boulevard and dropped him at the wharf. At the dock stewed the usual olio of smells: stale fish, flowers, sewers, beer, *crin de vegetal*, figs, alligator pears.

Jimmy looked across the harbor and saw the berth of the Rajah empty. A shock went through him as if some darling plan had gone astray. He wondered if Judith were in Biskra, and if she had bargained for the camels.

A cage of three despondent red apes in a sunny corner of the wharf moved Jimmy's sympathy. He bought three guavas from an Arab fruiterer and handed them through the bars to the captives. The apes received them gravely, like three grief-struck gentlemen. They bit away and spat out the peduncles with sad little twists of their heads.

"They remember their freedom in the jungle," thought Jimmy. There was a pathos about it.

He took out his watch and recalculated the number of hours and minutes till his elopement. Then he went to lunch himself.

That night, something-after midnight, in a haze of moonlight that encompassed Algiers a clumsy boat nuzzled the point of rocks just outside the sea wall off the Esplanade Bab el Oued.

Jimmy Million looked up and down the boulevard, then vaulted the low rampart and picked his way across the sheeny footing left by the ebbing tide.

A bundle lay in the bow of the boat, and as Jimmy came up it developed into Mr. Feggy lying on his back with one leg cocked up over a thwart and the other crossed over it.

"Is hit time, sir?" asked the little man, getting himself into a more formal posture.

"Is Goombah here?"

"Not yet, sir."

"How long have you been waiting?"

"Hupwards a 'arf 'our, sir; lyin' 'ere looking hat the stars."

Jimmy sat down on the garboard and glanced at the moon.

"That big fellow's afraid of the sea on account of a fortune teller." Jimmy pondered over this. "Ever see a chap like him, Feggy?"

"Hamid Ziban, sir."

"Who's he?"

"Nobody now, sir."

The American turned around on the little cockney in the moonlight, and his look prodded Feggy to explain.

"'E was a big Afghan with Barnum, sir. 'E choked one of the dancing girls under a little top. It took the p'lice, the lion tamer, the knife thrower and the strong man to get 'im. The knife thrower was the one as really did hit, sir. 'E could split the pip on the ace o' spades ten steps." Mr. Feggy yawned. "W'en 'ad I thought of that before, sir—moonlight's a queer thing, sir."

The mean little tragedy so carelessly recalled wrought a vague uneasiness in Jimmy.

"You say Goombah Das is like him?"

"The very spit of 'im, sir, even to ways—"

The little man broke off abruptly. Jimmy glanced around. The tall form of the Targui stood immediately behind the American. Jimmy had an uncomfortable moment as he sat looking up at the black muslin mask. Then he recalled Goombah did not speak English.

"'Fraid you were not coming," observed Jimmy, shifting to his bad French with a nonchalance perhaps noticeable.

"I should not go," guttured Goombah, gazing over the black moon-spangled water.

"Don't think bad luck or it will draw it on you," advised Jimmy cheerfully.

Goombah put a hand on the toppy boat and rocked it gingerly.

"The sea has always cursed my race, M. Million," he burred gravely. "The sea beat my father and the father of my father's grandfather."

"Your great great grandfather—where?"

"At Carthage, *m'sieu*."

For a moment Jimmy accepted the information calmly, then his wonder grew.

"You mean at Tunis, don't you, Goombah? Carthage has been in ruins ever since—God knows when."

"And *m'sieu*, I said the father of my father's great great great grandfather," replied the tribesman. "I hate the sea."

Jimmy stared at the tall somber figure—Carthage—

"You don't mean Hannibal, Goombah Das?" he asked in wonder.

"*Oui, m'sieu*."

"I be damned!" Jimmy almost toppled into the dory.

But a grain of American skepticism soon flavored the wonder. However, he still leaned on the gunwale quite knocked over that Goombah should ever have had the hardihood to presume to such a mighty lineage.

"With your dislike of the ocean, I don't suppose you will fall in with Major Peleurie's plan to canalize the desert."

The masked face turned sharply on Jimmy.

"M. Million, is this a plan to stop any opposition I may have toward Major Peleurie's enterprise?"

"For the love of Mike!" in English, then in French. "No. How stop your opposition?"

"Are you going to object, M. Das?" Feggy peered at the tribesman with ratlike intentness.

"In the sea," replied Goombah to Million."

"Drown you?" gasped Jimmy. "Certainly not! My Heavens! Here, if you feel that way about it, stay ashore. Feggy and I will go get the girls—" He was about to push off.

Goombah climbed into the little vessel and straddled awkwardly to the back seat. Feggy unshipped the oars which he had muffled with bagging and took his place on the central thwart. Jimmy eased the nose off the rocks and stepped inside.

The moment the boat was actually under way for Count Nalaczi's garden, the expectation of Aicha drove all other thoughts

out of Jimmy's head. Here was the point of all this long preparation. He strained his eyes down the little strip of seawall toward the garden. He could fairly see the Moorish girl waiting in the flower plot for the boat that would bring him.

Presently the high wall of the garden was visible. Jimmy's heart beat. Beyond that she stood waiting. The glamour and mystery of a Moorish maiden, an Eastern bride poured over his soul. The tubby boat swung past the open end of the garden. Jimmy could see inside now; masses of foliage silvered in moonbeams; near the end of the garden big white moon-flowers starred a night of leaves. Little waves chased from the dory and wrecked in strings of fire on the garden beach. A stray breath of perfume drifted to him like a kiss from the girl who awaited him. The perfume grew stronger.

The American searched the gloom with his eyes. Suddenly his heart gave such a beat it hurt him. He saw the gleam of her dress in the darkness. He drew breath to shout his happiness. But he used it to whisper to Feggy:

"Hurry, Feggy—damn it, man!"

The cockney leaned more stiffly on his silent oars.

Jimmy had a foot on the blockhead ready to jump. Ten yards from the shore the keel grounded.

The American strode out impetuously into thigh-deep water. He took a step forward with the white figure of his betrothed in his eyes when something curled around his ankle. He tried to kick loose and go forward, but a cold cable wrapped swiftly around his other leg. An instant later an arm dabbled out of the sea and coiled about his waist. It was a wet gelatinous arm that gleamed grayly in the moonlight. It was as large around as his biceps.

With rising fear Jimmy caught at the tentacle and tried to pull it from his body. It was worse than pulling at an eel; it was worse than pulling at a leech. At his effort a hideous company of arms rose up out of the sea and with a faint dripping sound, silently converged upon him.

The sheer horror of the attack overpowered Million. He flung up his hands

against two arms looping toward his neck. As he gripped them the loose ends wrapped around his wrists and a pain like fire ran over his flesh as the sucking discs touched his skin. Behind him a slimy arm was feeling up his back. Million knew the next instant it would be at his throat. He leaned forward, craning his head away, pushing the burning tentacles around his wrists further away. He tried to step and balance himself. His legs were fast. He felt himself falling. Even as he fell he squirmed against still other arms feeling for his neck—

A hand stopped his fall, and at the same moment Jimmy heard a faint chucking in the water behind him as if a sharp sword had cleft the sea. Next moment the arm groping up his back hung limp in his collar attached by the little hook at its end. He could feel the severed tentacle wriggling. It sickened him.

With curious intelligence the squid shifted its attack to Goombah almost the instant the tribesman stepped into the sea. By this time its whole gelatinous mass was out of water, a flabby, glistening gray. A big inky eye stared from the middle of its body. One of its arms whipped up and manacled the Targui's sword hand. Two more curled about the tribesman's huge legs. Goombah braced himself amid the sucking horror. He forced his arms down toward its single inky eye. The desert raider strained down, joined his finger-tips, and pressed them into the wide pitchy eye. In they went, tearing the membrane, into the cold body. Getting a grip on the thick, slimy edges of the sac, the Targui lifted the mass as high as his chest and tore it asunder.

The arms of the devilish loosed their hold and flung out in the moonlight, knotting, straightening, writhing. A stream of black liquid spewed up into the air. Then the monster slid off the Targui's hands. Its two halves plopped back into the sea, held together by a shred.

For a moment Jimmy stood silent, shaking uncontrollably. The Targui reached out and disengaged the tentacle that still hung from Million's collar, and the two men plashed softly ashore. The whole

struggle had taken place almost as silently as the moonlight falling on the water.

Only the thought of the girl in the garden prevented Jimmy from going sick at this nauseating adventure. He waded on up the beach, then mounted a sharp incline of vines toward the woman who still stood transfixed under the acacia.

"Aicha!" he trembled, moving forward unsteadily, "Aicha!"

The white form of the woman slowly dissolved into the grotesque marble fountain which he had seen on his first look into Nalaczi's garden. In the moonlight Jimmy could see the marble face of a gargoyle screwed into a sneer past all human possibility. It was a masterpiece of the diabolical exaggeration of the East.

Million stood staring at it. Goombah Das and Feggy waded up out of the sea. As the Targui passed him, the raider asked in his guttural undertone, "Did you fancy a woman would really meet you, *m'sieu*?" And the two figures tramped on and disappeared in the shadow of the villa.

Jimmy held to the acacia, looking about the silent garden. His whole hope of Aicha suddenly became as far away and unreal as before. Then a weak hope struck him that Aicha had hidden when she saw so many men wading out of the boat.

He loosed the tree and made a shaky round of the bushes, peering into possible recesses, calling her name in a guarded tone. Presently he came upon a black mass on a stone bench under a little rose arbor. He went to it, bent down; after a few moments he knelt down and buried his face in its sweetness. It was the soft, perfumed mass of a woman's hair clipped close from her head.

The implication hammered in Million's brain with a rising despair. The Moorish punishment for unfaithful wives is to cut off the nose; for unfaithful betrothed, to lop off the hair.

The man picked up the heavy braid and sat down with it in his arms as if it were a dead sweetheart. His lips were dry. His overwrought imagination pictured the shears hacking off this lively coronal, and then, with a kind of wring at his heart, Aicha's head shaved like a nun's—

In the perfumed moonlight the gargoyle stared down at him with its ironical *moue*. From the upper end of the garden Feggy called back that the villa was deserted.

CHAPTER VI.

FOLLOW THE LEADER.

A SMALL form crept along the top of the garden wall with stops now and then to peer about and listen. The sight startled Million out of his melancholy thoughts in the rose arbor. Through the veil of moonlight the American recognized the dwarfish figure of the creature Gwarli. Instantly Nalaczi's whole play in this game flashed through Jimmy's head.

By some means the count had discovered the tryst, and had sent this dwarf and his poisoned blowgun to dispatch the intruders. Next moment Jimmy slipped down beside the dogana in the shadow, eased his Colt from his inside pocket, and leveled it in a moonbeam. He felt a qualm in firing pointblank and on suspicion, yet he knew the creature itself was as quick as a cobra. The dwarf lay flat on the wall, his bulk just discernible.

The little creature was studying the lights and shadows of the inclosure. Its murderous intent became fairly proved to Jimmy. He lowered the glimmer of his bead till it covered the bulk, and squeezed the trigger cautiously. At that moment the creature whipped out of sight as abruptly as a squirrel.

The American remained crouched, trigger still under strain, unsure whether the little poisoner had vanished on the inside or the outside of the wall.

As he squatted, there grew upon Million a realization of how costly had been his indecision. The creeping snakelike creature was now upon more than even terms with him. Gwarli could move about with the facility of a cat, while if Jimmy merely moved the whole garden would hear the crunching. If the dwarf in his reconnoitering had discovered Million's position all he would have to do would be to creep around and pot him. Jimmy knew the little poisoner would do this with entire un-

concern. There would be no indecision on his part.

The entomologist held his breath, listening with open mouth, ready to fire at a rustle now, but no rustle came. The garden lay absolutely silent. A sweat broke out on Jimmy's face. It would probably be five or ten minutes before the creature with the blowgun wriggled around the inclosure and shot him.

The American searched every shadow in sight, watching it intently to see if it moved. Presently, under his strained gaze, they seemed to gain the quality of movement. Million eased back the hammer of his revolver to give it the rapidity of a single action. It whispered two clicks under his thumb, but these sounded with painful loudness. He wondered with despairing, unuttered profanity why he had thrown away his chance for an open shot.

A beetle blundered into the rose bower, making a great noise. It struck some tenderil overhead and tumbled down on Jimmy's neck. He did not dare lift a hand. He twisted under its cusped legs, and even in his discomfort, and amid his strained attention, he classified it by its size and feel as one of the lamellicornia, perhaps a scarabæus. The thing pushed stupidly under his collar and started down his back.

Suddenly Jimmy became sure the dwarf was in the lower end of the garden squirming toward him through the heavy undergrowth. He thought of firing in that direction. Another notion flashed through his head of jumping and running for the sea and trying to dive to his boat. At that moment he heard Feggy and Goombah Das climb out of the villa window into the garden. They were talking in an undertone.

"'E's clean gone, Mr. Das, sir, an' 'e must 'ave took it with 'im, sir."

"But where did he go?" burred the Targui, "and what made him go?"

"It's wery simple wot made 'im go, sir," assured the cockney. "Hall 'e would 'ave to do, sir, was to look into the High of Hallah, and see wot was goin' to 'appen, sir, and avoid hit."

"If he saw what was going to happen,

how could he avoid it?" criticized the tribesman.

"'E could see 'imself avoidin' hit, sir," suggested Feggy with undisturbed logic.

Jimmy could see their forms coming down the path in the moonlight. He knew the dwarf would poison without discrimination, and that he must warn them. He gathered his breath and shouted:

"Goombah—Feggy—watch out!"

To his relief, both figures disappeared into the shadows. After an interval Feggy's voice came guardedly:

"Wot's hup, sir?"

"A little devil with a blowgun—shoots poison—keep hid!"

There was no answer. Jimmy's tension eased a trifle that his friends were warned. Almost at the same instant came a queer gurgling "Voici!" just behind Jimmy's hiding place between the arbor and the east wall. The American whirled for a point-blank shot, and saw a little arm thrust in through the arbor holding a scrap of white. The hand almost touched him. "Voici!" gurgled the voice again.

Million trembled in the edge of firing. The hand shook the scrap of paper impatiently. Million reached out gingerly. He might have been taking it from the mouth of a cobra.

It was a note. A single glance at it in the moonlight showed its contents:

Follow Gwarli.

AICHA.

A great relief came over the American. He arose with a cramped feeling, calling: "It's all right, boys—a note from Aicha."

The two men reappeared in the moonlight, then the dwarf himself crept out from behind the arbor and stood looking up at the intruders in his master's garden. The nearer view of the creature's face fascinated Million. The dwarf was less than waist high, moon-faced, short wide nose, a wide mouth with thick everted lips that rolled themselves mechanically into a smile, like a flute player. But the moment he really laughed or opened his mouth he exhibited two rows of big white teeth filed to saw shape. This changed his face from a goblinlike imbecility to the savagery of an orang.

The dwarf and the men stood looking at each other. The beetle down Jimmy's back reasserted itself. Million tried to reach it, but could not quite. He kept jabbing his hand down his back while Goombah and Feggy discussed the dwarf.

"It is a Bakwa. It comes from the Uganda regions," guttured the Targui. "I saw some at Gondokoro when I was there with a caravan."

"Barnum had one in his side-show," recalled the cockney. "'E never would 'ave a bath."

"See if you can reach this confounded beetle, Feggy," snapped Jimmy, losing patience.

Million bent over. Feggy thrust a hand down his collar, caught the beetle, and tossed it away.

The bug adjusted its clumsy wings in mid-air and began buzzing upward. The dwarf looked around; then with a burst of amazing agility he darted toward the beetle, leaped in the air fully as high as Goombah Das's head, and caught the coleoptera. He lit on both feet, clapped the bug in his hideous mouth, and cracked the shard with his saw teeth.

"Ugh!" burst out Jimmy irrepressibly.

Even Goombah Das was affected. He grunted and turned his back on the Bakwa. "What does your note say, M. Million?" he asked, ignoring the bestiality.

"To follow Gwarli."

"She doesn't say where she is?"

"No."

"The Targui hesitated. 'Nor who is with her?'"

"I suppose they are both together."

"I wonder if we could find out anything from this creature?" He nodded at the Bakwa.

"Try him, Feggy."

The little globe-trotting cockney had absorbed a working smattering of many tongues. He began trying them out on the Bakwa, who stood unmoved in the moonshine with his preposterous lips rolled up into a flute player's smile.

"Let me see," speculated Goombah Das. "If I could recall a few words of Mbuba that I picked up in Gondokoro—" He paused, evidently trying to recall some dim

vocabulary. At last he uttered some queer twanging sounds to the dwarf.

The effect was odd. The creature burst into an excited twanging that vaguely reminded Jimmy of a banjo. It bounced over to the Targui, caught his hand, nuzzled it like an affectionate monkey, then dropped and embraced the desert raider's ankles.

"You've made a hit with it," laughed Jimmy, who was rapidly losing all feeling that the Bakwa was human.

"What did it say, sir?" asked the cockney.

Goombah looked down at the thing. "I don't know what it said. I just recall a few of its words."

"I wouldn't let it rub against me like that," said Jimmy, with a shudder of revulsion.

Goombah looked down at it. "I suppose the creature is homesick, M. Million. Then, too, if it will really lead me to— Shall we be going?"

"By all means."

Jimmy glanced about the garden and recalled the tonsure of hair in the rose arbor. As he started for it he wondered what sort of insectivorous life the dwarf led that he should be homesick for it. It also occurred to Jimmy that the Targui must be a man of wider humanity than he had first thought. Goombah's treatment of the dwarf suggested it.

"By the way, Feggy," asked Million, "are you going with us on this new lap?"

"I 'ope to, Mr. Million, sir," said the cockney, casting an anxious glance at the two men. "I 'ave looked all hover the villa, sir, and make bold to say hit's not in there, sir."

Million stared at his henchman.

"You don't mean to say you've burglarized Count Nalaczi's villa?"

The mean little man was taken aback. "Hi didn't take nothin', sir."

"You meant to take it if you found it!" condemned the American.

Feggy moistened his lips in the moonlight. "You said as 'ow 'e would give it to me, sir, if I arsked 'im for it, sir."

"Have you asked him?" demanded the moralist.

"I meant to telephone 'im, sir, w'en I 'ad it," shuffled the cockney.

Million waved aside the evasion.

"Look here, Feggy, do you think Goombah Das and I want to be found in company with a damn burglar when we are conducting a genteel elopement? We'd be disgraced."

From the Targui came a sudden grating rumble. Million looked about and saw the raider was laughing. His broad shoulders heaved and his breath blew out his muslin mask in puffs.

The Arkansan stared at him blankly. He had no idea why the man from Ouarglum was stirred to mirth. Never before had he seen Goombah smile. And it was destined this time was the last but one that Million should ever hear the raider's grating laughter.

"I can go along, sir, I 'ope," begged Feggy humbly.

"If you'll play a gentleman's game, Feggy."

"To the best of my hability, Mr. Million, sir."

Somewhat excited over his homily, Million went into the rose bower, picked up the coil of hair, and wound it about his waist under his coat. It went around twice, a black silken zone. As he adjusted it a feminine odor floated up to his nostrils and tingled at some obscure nerve. And then the first feeling of pathos at this sacrilege came back to him.

He wondered how Aicha would look without her sable crown—that exquisite maiden tonsured! The enormity of the thing grew and grew upon him. He pressed his fingers into the feminine hair.

The three men abandoned their dory, climbed the wall, and set out up the moonlit boulevard toward Goombah's house to get the horses. The dwarf followed the three, or rather ran ahead of them, making senseless detours like a dog. Now he jumped up on and ran along the sea wall, then darted across the street to lose himself in the shadows of the buildings, to reappear, perhaps, blocks farther on.

When the adventurers entered the Rue de la Kasbah the booth lights had been extinguished. The tunneled stairway was de-

serted and in darkness except for the night lamps. At an intersection of one of the cross streets the dwarf made a dart into the gloom. A thin squealing followed. He reappeared under a lamp holding a rat by the neck. He sank his odious saw teeth into the vermin's skull; it squeaked and fell limp. With a gurgled "Voici!" he offered it to Goombah.

It was little more than a terrier dropping a rat at its master's legs.

Goombah took the rat, patted the creature's head, and later, when the dwarf had dashed off again, tossed the vermin down an alley.

A little way farther up the trio and the pigmy turned down the narrow cross street to the Targui's home.

A single light still guttered in front of the building. As Jimmy walked down the noisome alley, it seemed weeks, even months, since he had passed that way with Miss Montfairly. He thought how Goombah had lain in wait for him, half-minded to strike him dead. But he was alive because the Targui had foreseen just this eventuality. And here it was, all working out.

A horse neighed as Goombah opened the door.

The raider admitted his guests ceremoniously. They passed under a sotto portico and at the farther end of the tunnel Goombah paused to light two flambeaux in sockets just inside the *oust*, or Moorish court. At that moment a great noise broke loose on the north side of the court, and Jimmy instantly recognized the sound as a horse kicking furiously in a barn. The Targui grabbed a flambeau and ran across.

Sure enough the north side was a stable. A stallion with a magnificent white rump and tail—for that was all Jimmy could make out in the light—was letting fly with both heels. Just out of reach of the hurtling hoofs stood Gwarli. The stallion was frantic. Jimmy fancied it must be from the dwarf's odor. Goombah motioned the Bakwa up to the second floor. When the creature had gone the Targui soothed his animal.

The entire lower story of the Arab's house was a stable and barn. This gave Jimmy,

a certain homey feeling, for he had seen the like in the old French quarter of New Orleans.

While the horse was kicking a door opened on the second floor and a voice called down in Arabic. Goombah answered in the same tongue, then the three men mounted to the upper story.

After walking a little distance along a dark outer balcony Jimmy entered a dazzle of light. A long hall-like room extended across the entire west end of the villa, and it was illuminated almost to noon brilliance by what was practically a frieze of candles. Down the center of this room was a table at least thirty feet long, and not more than a foot high, and it was covered with a feast. Novel and tempting smells of food filled the place. An Arab youth was still applying a torch to some unlighted candles at the farther end of the hall.

At first Jimmy was merely dazzled by the display; gradually his eye took in the savory details. In the center of the table, on an enormous silver platter lay a lamb roasted whole in the Arab fashion, "mesh'we," they call it. It was flanked with "berkouks cherchem," a kind of Algerian pastry. Then there were "taam," red peppers, figs, round cakes of vetch bread, wheat bread. Jugs of new and sour milk glistened in their places up and down the board. Globules of strange fruits, scarlet and gold and brown were piled between plates. The aroma of spiced Turkish coffee blended in the bouquet.

It was all entirely new to Jimmy. Like most tourists in foreign countries he had eaten at European cafés and hotels. Million stared at the feast quite at a loss why it should be.

"You don't keep a banquet going like this all the time, do you, Goombah?" he asked in astonishment.

The tribesman's dark mask stood facing the brilliant, empty room and its piled-up viands.

"I would make a 'diffu,' he burred, unconsciously using the Arabic word for 'feast,' 'to celebrate the return of my heart, *m'sieu'*. I thought perhaps if the All Highest was kind two brides would bless this wedding feast."

"Oh—so it was partly for me, and—and Aicha?"

"Yes, *m'sieu'*."

In its way the scene before Jimmy was more prodigal than the old South in antebellum days, and the boy received his first intimation of what generosity this man from Ouarglum possessed. What a feast he had prepared for Million with whom only twenty-four hours previously he had been at sword's point.

"Goombah!" cried the youth impulsively. "Don't you regret that unlucky game of roulette that—"

"Regret it!" The Targui's eyes glowed through the black muslin at Jimmy. He made a gesture. "*M'sieu'*, I am alive in this city of dead men. My life is as keen as the tip of my sword. I feel—"

He was interrupted by Gwarli. The dwarf entered the door and made a dash for the greatest heap of food, squatted and began gorging with both hands into his abominable mouth.

Jimmy strode toward the little animal with the intention of driving him from the table, but the tribesman shook his head.

"Let him alone. What difference does it make. Now all this is nothing—" He paused a moment, then added, "Let us eat, too, M. Million. The stomach is a friend to the heart."

The three men squatted at the table. The two westerners tried to curl their feet under them as did Goombah. Feggy succeeded fairly. Million shifted continually to prevent cramping. The Arab boy, whose name was Zab, served the diners.

Goombah and Zab passed a word now and then in Arabic. Otherwise little was said. The roast lamb, with its Arabic condiments, had a queer, delicious flavor. The berkouks felt like tapioca and tasted like nuts. The American tried to imagine Aicha as his bride at this feast. What a strange, luxurious bridal supper it would have been! What a realization of the bizarre longings of his boyhood! He became conscious of the woman's hair about his body. The possibility of this amazing, passionate experience was crumbling right at his finger-tips. A grayness fell upon the very lights around him.

The dwarf ate noisily, turning his head from one side to the other over the sheep bones exactly as the three red apes had bitten their guavas.

When the men finished their meal in the empty hall Goombah led the American into a small room, where he laid out a complete Targui costume. The Targui explained the reason for the change. They were no doubt going to Nalaczi's country place. Jimmy's European clothing would advertise his coming and prepare the enemy for resistance. The tall man retired while Jimmy made the change.

Million placed Aicha's coil of hair under his new lace-trimmed shirt. He shifted his revolver to a new pocket. The tight silk breeches looked rather well on the Arkansan. They gave him greater freedom than usual. He was very conscious of his finery as he walked into the banquet hall, which was deserted. He went on down into the *oust*.

Four polished Arab horses with high-horned Arab saddles stood dancing in the *oust*. When the dwarf approached any of the animals they screamed and kicked. The boy Zab mounted and rode out of the entrance as Jimmy descended the stairs. Goombah helped Feggy mount a black horse which the little Englishman sat with obvious misgivings. Jimmy swung onto a gleaming bay mare.

The moment the Southerner felt the animal between his knees he knew he was on a notable bit of horse-flesh, and his respect for Goombah Das as a human being went still higher. It struck Jimmy as odd that such a breed of horses had not been heard from in the Kentucky and Tennessee sweepstakes.

Goombah Das vaulted onto the white stallion, patted his bowed neck, then eased him up to where Gwarli stood at the mouth of the sotto portico. Evidently he intended to swing the dwarf up behind him. The stallion sidled up, every muscle twitching. Goombah coaxed the animal. Finally he was close enough to reach down and catch the goblin's hand, and lift him clear.

Instantly the Bakwa gave a screech, curled around the Targui's hand. Jimmy saw a gleam of his big, saw-filed teeth.

Goombah Das dropped him in astonishment, then flung a spatter of blood from the back of his hand.

The horse was dancing on springs. Goombah stared at the tiny monster and finally collected enough Mbuba to ask a question. Gwarli twanged out something, shrinking away from the huge stallion in evident terror.

"Then lead on," cried Goombah, motioning to the creature.

Instantly Gwarli shot through the tunnel and the cavalcade thundered after him, the riders leaning low to avoid being scraped off by the cross bars of the second story.

Million hardly realized they were off and the pursuit of the women had begun. The horses thundered bravely through the musky *rue*. The house, the feast, the flambeaux, the frieze of burning candles were left open and deserted.

For a moment a puritan qualm went through Jimmy. Where and how had the masked giant gathered such wealth that he could casually abandon such plate and such furnishings?

Million's bay swung through the night like a winged rocking chair. The hoofbeats of the trio filled the narrow *rue* with thunder. Ahead of the riders the dwarf crisscrossed the thoroughfare, making unnecessary doglike detours, now and then sprinting away from the pounding horses.

Their course lay up a gentle incline that turned into the Rue du Sahel. This broad thoroughfare leads past the Kasbah, or old fort, of the Deys. The ancient walls of the fortification were lost in their own shadows. A sentry, half asleep at the gate, roused somewhat from where he leaned on his rifle to watch the horsemen roar past under the sinking moon.

Half a mile from the old fort is an old unshuttered gate in the crumbling city walls. The three Arabian horses fled through this with gathering fire into the cool fragrance of the tropical night.

Ahead of them scurried Gwarli. He looked like a shadow skimming over the ground. In the moonlit stretches of the road Million could make out the twinkle of his legs.

During the first fifteen minutes Jimmy

momentarily expected the dwarf to slow up panting and climb up behind Goombah. For the next half hour the American's surprise mounted through astonishment into amazement. He doubted his own senses. The twinkle of the little monster's flying legs gave an unreality to the whole adventure. The faint rocking motion of the bay, the steady blast of chill perfume in his face enhanced that feeling.

The moon slept over the foothills of the Atlas range filling the western half of the valleys with ink and the eastern halves with silver. Million's lacy shirt and silken trousers, the Moorish girl's tonsure wrapped about his heart, the dwarf, Goombah—it was all the very woof of a dream.

Million drew his mare over beside the stallion.

"Can that little hellion hold out all night?" he asked, in order to convince himself he was awake.

"All night and all day to-morrow, *m'sieu*," guttured the Targui. "The Bakwa chase down ostriches in the Sahara."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

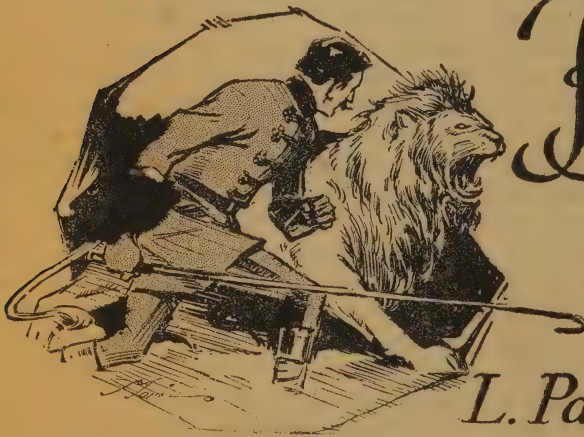
The answer was as fantastic as the setting.

At a turn of the wide French thoroughfare far up in the Atlas foothills the dwarf suddenly deserted the main road for a mountain trail black in shadow. The bay mare took the rougher course without giving the dreamer an extra jar. On they charged through obscurity. An occasional moonbeam showed Gwarli still ahead.

At a turn in the path high up on the first Atlas range Jimmy looked back and saw, far away on the horizon, reduced to a mere twinkle on the long, dark coast line where Africa shoulders the Mediterranean, the lights of Algiers.

With a shock Jimmy remembered that Judith Montfairly was somewhere out in the desert waiting for him with camels. She was expecting him now every moment, perhaps peering at all the passengers that came out of the express. He wondered if there was a way to telegraph.

Ahead of the horses the dwarf shimmered through the night.



Beasts by

L. Patrick Greene

YOU have probably seen Barker many times in the past. He was at one time the star animal trainer with the biggest and best circus in the world.

He was, according to the lurid poster, "The Master of the Savage Beasts of the Jungle," "The Peerless and Fearless Trainer of Lions." And for once the posters did not exaggerate. He was all that and more.

Where he came from no one knows, and he was not the type of man to volunteer information, and most certainly no one ever ventured to question him concerning his past.

His cold, cruel eyes; the hint of a sneer which constantly hovered over his face; the fires of a hellish wrath, but faintly veiled, warned men to steer clear of Barker, to

brook insult—and he took a fiendish delight in acts which would rouse the resentment of his fellow performers—rather than face his anger and the physical strength he possessed, far beyond that of the average man, strength and a marvelous agility.

He had no friends—hardly an acquaintance. Even during the season when performers are more or less, by force of circumstances, thrown into close propinquity, Barker was a man set apart.

Hated and feared by all, he gloried in his isolation and would laugh harshly as the girls cringed fearfully to one side to let him pass.

An ill-favored, ill-tempered man. A man with all the emotions of a brute beast. A man with the strength of a gorilla, and the soul of a hyena.

Once a roustabout—a big, burly Dane—used to receiving and dealing hard knocks, had ventured to stand up to Barker.

With a hoarse bellow of rage Barker rushed in, entirely disregarding the other's heavy blows, closed with the Dane, and picking him up bodily, held him high above his head for one brief, struggling second. Then Barker threw him against the side of a near-by wagon, and after waiting a little while to see if any one else showed fight, strode swiftly to his quarters.

That was Barker. He seemed to cast a black pall over the circus folk.

But there was no doubt about the fact that he was without peer as a "trainer." Yet he was a man of violent emotions; his temper was ungovernable. Not the traits one looks for in an animal trainer; but the fact remains that he was successful—eminently successful.

Other men are able to teach their animals tricks after months of patient toil; patience born of love, and so gradually gain the confidence of their beasts. But Barker ruled by fear and because of his uncanny knowledge of their idiosyncrasies. True, too, that he had no fear of them—rather contempt.

Once when a lion balked at its trick Barker leaped upon its back, and in a fit of insane rage, beat it about the head with his bare fists, and the lion yipped like a licked cur. It was with lions that Barker achieved his greatest successes.

"A lion," he was fond of saying, "is a creature of fixed habits. He will always do exactly the same thing at the same time, and in the same way."

One trick which Barker perfected always created a sensation.

Joey, one of the clowns, would enter the cage of Rajah, a big, black-maned lion, apparently by mistake, and on seeing his predicament, Joey, with many comical expressions of dismay, would rush for the door. Finding that locked Joey would climb up the side of the cage and gain the comparative security of a small perch on which Rajah was wont to pose at the end of the act. No sooner had Joey reached this perch when Rajah would leap, missing the grimacing Joey by a few short feet.

A second attempt likewise failed, and before Rajah could leap again a door in the top of the cage opened and Joey was lifted to safety. As the door closed Rajah made a third, and this time successful, leap to the perch.

The whole trick was based on the knowledge that Rajah had always needed three leaps before he could reach the perch and always would.

"Even if he got up there with Joey," Barker explained, "Rajah wouldn't hurt him. Rajah doesn't know he's a lion."

Then one day Rajah made the perch at the first leap and—well, Rajah was a lion, and he *knew* it. Of course there was an inquest, but the verdict of accidental death was the only possible one.

Later on, however, other things came to light.

It was discovered, for instance, that there had been bad blood between Barker and Joey; a woman had preferred the clown to the ill-tempered trainer. It was discovered that on the morning of the fatal performance Barker had been teasing Rajah—had fed him raw meat, placing the bloody tit-bits on the perch which was Joey's haven of refuge. And finally a negro cageman confessed that Barker had ordered him to fix the perch a full foot lower than usual.

It was a diabolical plan and had been carried out without a hitch.

Still a search was made for Barker, who had disappeared directly after the inquest—

his nerve broken apparently—and a warrant was issued for his arrest. But it was all to no purpose. Barker had made good his escape. For once the vengeance of the law went unfulfilled.

And yet—

Johnson, the native commissioner of the Inyati district of Southern Rhodesia, frowned thoughtfully at the gray-bearded native—a petty chief of a district, judging by his head-ring—who stood fearlessly before him.

"You say," said the commissioner, "that you are innocent of this white man's death—that all your people are also innocent?"

"It is true, Inkosi," Tamba replied quietly.

"Yet you saw him die?"

"Aye."

"And made no attempt to save him?"

"Is it permitted that I tell the whole story, Inkosi?"

"Aye. Sit if thou art tired and take heed that thy tongue does not trip thee."

"My words are true words, Inkosi," Tamba said gravely. "A headman of the Matabele does not lie."

Tamba carefully lowered himself to the ground, and leaning his back against the wall of the commissioner's hut, unfolded his story.

It is well known to you, Inkosi, that the place of my kraal is shunned by the white men. We live in a valley, and on either side of the paths leading to the kraal is a sea of mire. Should a man traveling those paths, make a false step he would quickly sink up to his waist in the mud, and if no help came speedily to him, in a little while, a very little while, the mud would close above his head; there would be nothing left to tell the story of his folly.

The heat of the valley is beyond the power of man to express; it is as though all the kraal fires of the land were gathered together in one place. At night a heavy, fever-laden mist hangs over the place.

Yet, because we are what we are, we black ones flourish in that place. Beyond the mire the soil is rich. Our crops excel the crops of all other people; our crops are fat beyond compare. So, because of our

richness white men came to the valley and sought to trade with us. Aye, they opened a store at my kraal and all my men were bidden to enter and buy.

But hardly a moon had passed before these white men went to the Land of the Great Spirits, for their bodies had no strength to fight the fever mists. Others came in their place that the work of trading might continue. And these, too, left us after a little while.

Then, for the space of many moons, no white men came; the store was closed, no guard was set about it, and after a while some of my younger men urged that we break into the place and take its contents to ourselves.

"For," said they, "the white men have forgotten us—they have forgotten the goods of trade which are stored in this place."

As for me I was of one mind with them, yet I urged them to wait until the coming of the full moon.

It so happened that before the moon came to the full a white man came to take charge of the store.

He was a big man, bigger than the general run of men, bigger even than I was in the prime of my youth and, as you may well judge, I was no weakling. The girth of his upper arm and his mighty chest spoke of a strength like unto that of a giant gorilla. Aye, there was much about him that was like unto the big apes. His head hung forward on his bull-like neck; his narrow eyes, bloodshot, glinted with evil cunning.

And, like a gorilla, this man, this Imonga, as we called him, kept always to himself. Rarely did he exchange words other than in the way of trade with us black ones, and when white men were hunting in the hills beyond the valley he made no attempt to seek their company; rather, he shunned them.

Yes; that first day we named him Imonga—the Evil One—for his very presence filled us with a strange fear, and even on that first day it came to us that he would not leave us in the way those other white men went from us. He was one of us, and yet not of us. He was—pardon, Inkosi, that I speak ill of a white man—less than us. He was of kin with the evil beasts of the jungle

and we knew that the fever would not take him from us. How we prayed that this might come to pass quickly.

And if it was like this in the beginning how can I tell you of the misery that became our daily lot after Imonga had dwelt among us many moons?

There was, and I speak a true word, no good thing in him. His tongue was crooked; and always he dealt unjustly in the way of trade.

But worse than this was the beating he gave the men and women of the kraal who dared to question his word. At such times he was as one gone mad, and there was no warrior who could stand against him.

Some men, is it not known to you also, who have no love for their own kind are gentle as a woman in their dealing with animals?

But not so Imonga. All the dogs of the kraal howled with fear and ran to hide at his approach; the children drove their pet goats hurriedly from his path, and I have seen him smash, with his naked fist, the nose of a mule which was slow to obey the command of his voice.

With me, the headman of the kraal, Imonga dealt more gently, specially when he had been drinking deeply of the white man's *sterick mouti*.

"See here," he said once, and showed me a picture of a man, dressed in gayly colored clothes, putting his head into a lion's mouth.

"What will happen to that man?" Imonga asked.

I looked at the picture, amazement in my heart, and answered:

"That man will meet death."

Then Imonga laughed harshly.

"Not so," he said. "That man and Imonga are one and the same."

Perhaps he saw the look of disbelief in my eyes, for he continued:

"What, you dog, do you doubt my word? That is but a trick. I have done it many times."

I was silent, and he drank deeply from the bottle which was on the table before him.

"Say now, Tamba," he said suddenly, "are there lions in this valley?"

"That is well known to you," I answered.

And indeed only that morning a lioness had pulled down, and killed, no fewer than twenty goats. She had cubs with her, so the spoor showed, and the killing of the goats was, methinks, in order to show her young how to bring down the game.

"How old, judge you," asked Imonga, "were those cubs?"

"Twelve months, no less," I answered.

"It is too old," he muttered. "They have tasted blood. Proclaim to your people," he went on in a louder voice, "that I will give one bottle of strong water to the man who brings to me a lion cub—a male cub—not yet weaned from his mother's milk."

"It is no little thing you ask. Nevertheless, I will give the word." So I answered Imonga.

Because it was well to meet the desires of Imonga lest evil come upon us, my hunters took to the trail, and one of them, Nyama by name, won the prize. He also died shortly after. There is nothing more savage than a lioness deprived of her young, and though many assagais pierced her through and through, she lived long enough to break through the ring of spears where Nyama stood with the cub in his arms.

I shall not tell of the years which passed ere the lion cub became full grown. He was a mighty monster when he had attained growth. A black-maned, snarling fury. Nor shall the story be told in its entirety of the dealing of Imonga with us. Remember only that while he lived among us, fear dwelt with us also.

Evil I say lived with us, for he taught our young men to mock the old traditions, to drink continually of the "strong water"—and that way lies degradation. But worse than all this, he took certain of our young maidens to dwell with him—by force if need be—and that way lies confusion.

Everywhere he went he was accompanied by Silwane—the lion. Aye; they made a fearsome couple. They were agents of the evil one without doubt. A collar of goat-skin was about Silwane's neck, to which was tied a rope no thicker than my little finger. By that leash Imonga kept the mighty beast in check.

It was always a thing of wonder to me to

watch those two. To see Silwane stalking by Imonga's side like a dog; and like a dog he would sit and beg, obeying the commands of Imonga in all things. I have even seen Silwane open wide his mighty jaws and permit Imonga to put his head in his mouth.

Somewhat Imonga told me the secret of his power over Silwane.

At no time was the lion fed by other than Imonga—indeed, none of my people would go near him. Great as was their fear of Imonga, their fear of Silwane was even greater. Much milk and green stuffs Imonga fed to Silwane, and as he grew from manhood, he fed him meat. But that meat was well cooked; it was meat that had no tang of blood in it.

"He does not know that he is a lion," said Imonga, "and he knows that I am his master. When he was a cub the cord which was about his neck held him fast, and choked him if he did not come to my call. He still answers that call, fearing, should he disobey, that the choking will follow. Aye; even were he in mid-air, at the highest point of his spring, he would check his flight at my call and return with great speed to my side."

And it was even so. Ask me not how this could be. It was so. I have seen it with my own eyes. I tell a true thing.

There came a time when Imonga tried to take to himself my daughter.

Crying bitterly she told me of the story of the affront offered her, and of how she had escaped because Thuso—one of my young hunters; a man who sought with my consent and hers my daughter's hand in marriage—had dared to take issue with Imonga.

Hardly was the story told when others came crying that Thuso was dead; that Imonga had killed him and was even now coming in search of my daughter, thrashing with a sjambok, the whip of rhinoceros hide, all who crossed his path.

Telling the maidens to hasten to the secret hiding places in the swamp I went forward to meet Imonga.

Was I not the headman of the kraal? And was it not my duty to protect my people? Besides, the maiden affronted was my daughter.

"Where is thy daughter?" roared Imon-

ga when I met up with him. "I would do her great honor, but she, as do all bashful maidens, runs in mock terror from me."

"It is no honor you offer her," I answered, "but dishonor. It is in real terror that she flees from you. Know now that the daughter of Tamba is not for you; further, there must be an accounting for the slaying of Thuso."

"Say you so?"

He made a sudden rush at me, so swift that I could make no move to protect myself, and with his clenched fist dealt me a mighty blow on the point of the jaw, and I went down in a heap.

When I opened my eyes he was gazing stupidly at his fist. The force of the blow had, as I well believe, broken the knuckles of his hand. The skin was torn, and the blood flowed freely.

"I did wrong," he said quietly. "Come to the store and we will talk this thing over."

With a feeling of relief I silently followed him; glad that he would condescend to deal in words and not in further blows.

When we reached the store he turned upon me suddenly and crushed me in his mighty grip. The light faded from my eyes and for a time I knew no more.

It was nearing sun-down when knowledge came to me again. I was locked in the iron shed which served as a storehouse. My hands were tied securely behind my back; my feet also were bound together. Yet I managed to reach the door and could look through the barred opening in it. I called aloud to Imonga, telling him to release me. He came quickly to my call and laughed when I threatened to command my warriors to put him to death.

"Where are thy warriors?" he scoffed. "They are hiding from my wrath like frightened children. Now listen to my words. Until the rising of to-morrow's sun I will give you to think over these two commands of mine.

"First, you shall give your daughter to me; secondly, the manner of Thuso's death must be entirely forgotten by you and by your people."

"And if I refuse to obey your commands?" I asked. "What then?"

"Then I shall turn into that hut Silwane, and the two of you shall stay there together until such time as you see fit to obey me. No food shall be given to you—or to Silwane. You both shall go hungry unless you feed upon Silwane or, perchance, Silwane feeds on you."

As for the rest—this is how my memory of it runs:

Through the opening in the door of the shed I watched. Imonga sat in a chair, and in his right hand was a bottle from which he drank constantly. His other hand—his wounded one, the one he hurt when he hit me so mightily—hung over the side of his chair.

Silwane reclined beside him, and as I watched, I saw Imonga toy with the mane of the lion; saw him scratch the big beast between the ears with his wounded hand. And Silwane purred—a harsh, rasping purr—under his master's caress.

After a little while Imonga fell into a deep sleep. It was the heavy, deathlike sleep of drunkenness.

Even now I can see the man; his face covered with a black, bristly beard which mingled with the hair on his mighty chest. His mouth was wide open, showing the fang-like, yellow teeth. Even in sleep he was a menace.

Then, as I watched, I saw Silwane licking the hand of Imonga—licking it as a dog will lick the hand of his master.

Imonga shuddered as though troubled by a dream, and a loud moan came from his lips. His hand twitched slightly, and Silwane ceased for a moment his licking to look up into his master's face. At that

moment I saw that Imonga's hand was covered with blood—fresh blood—flowing blood. It came to me that the rough tongue of Silwane had reopened the wound on Imonga's hand.

I would have called aloud, but something, and it was not fear, bade me hold my tongue.

Again Silwane began to lick the hand, purring as he did so. Again the white man stirred in his sleep, and this time he pulled his hand away from Silwane.

Then, Inkosi, the tawny one, rose to his feet; from his mighty throat sounded the evil snarl of an angry lion.

Imonga opened his eyes at the sound, and turning his head, looked wonderingly at Silwane—the evil, snarling Silwane—then down at his bloody hand.

In that moment Imonga knew what fear was; knew that the time had come when he must meet the vengeance of the great ones. In that moment the realization must have come to him, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning, that Silwane, having tasted blood—the blood of a man—*knew* that he was a lion.

Just that moment was given Imonga that he might fully sense the doom in store for him—the spirits are always just—and then Silwane leaped.

"That is all, Inkosi," concluded Tamba, rising slowly to his feet. The beast of the jungle delivered us from the hold of a greater beast in the guise of man.

"Now, have I your leave to go, Inkosi?"

Johnson nodded absently. His mind was too full of the wonder of things for words.



THE 150TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

NIGHT DRUMS

BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "The Blue-Eyed Manchu," etc.

(*All-Story Weekly* as "Master of the Hour," December 22, 1917, to January 19, 1918.)

Published in book form by the James A. McCann Company, New York. Price \$1.90 net.

The Garden of Eden

Part III
by Max Brand



Author of "The Untamed," "Trailin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONNOR TURNS POET.

ALTHOUGH David was smiling when he left Abraham, he was serious when he turned from the door of the old man. He went to Connor's room, it was empty. He summoned Zacharias.

"The men beyond the mountains are weak," said David, "and when I left him a little time since Benjamin was sighing and sleepy. But now he is not in his room. Where is he, Zacharias?"

"Shakra came into the *patio* and neighed," answered the negro, "and at that Benjamin came out, rubbing his eyes. 'My friend,' said he to me, and his voice was smooth—not like those voices—"

"Peace, Zacharias," said David. "Leave this talk of his voice and tell me where he is gone."

"Away from the house," said the old negro sullenly.

The master knitted his brows.

"You old men," he said, "are like yearlings who feel the sap running in their legs in the spring. You talk as they run—around and around. Continue."

Zacharias sulked as if he were on the verge of not speaking at all. But presently his eye lighted with his story.

"Benjamin," he went on, "said to me, 'My friend, that is a noble mare.'"

"She is a good filly," said I.

"With a hundred and ten up," said Benjamin, "she would make a fast track talk."

"What?" said David.

"I do not know the meaning of his words," said the old servant, "but I have told them as he said them."

"He is full of strange terms," murmured David. "Continue."

"He went first to one side of Shakra and then to the other. He put his hand into his coat and seemed to think. Presently he stretched out his hand and called her. She came to him slowly."

"Wonderful!"

"That was my thought," nodded Zacharias.

"Why do you stop?" cried David.

"Because I am talking around and around, like a running yearling," said Zacharias ironically. "However, he stood back at length and combed the forelock of Shakra with his fingers. 'Tell me, Zacharias,' he said, 'if this is not the sister of Glani?'"

"He guessed so much? It is strange!"

"Then he looked in her mouth and said that she was four years old."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 15.

"He is wise in horses, indeed."

"When he turned away Shakra followed him; he went to his room and came out again, carrying the saddle with which he rode Abra. He put this on her back and a rope around her neck. 'Will the master be angry if I ride her?' he asked.

"I told him that she was first ridden only three months before to-day, and that she must not be ridden more than fifty miles now in a day.

"He looked a long time at me, then said he would not ride farther than that. Then he went galloping down the road to the south."

"Good!" said the master, and sent a long whistle from the *patio*; it was pitched as shrill and small as the scream of a hawk when the hawk itself cannot be seen in the sky.

The negro ran into the house, and when he came out again bringing a pad Glani was already in the *patio*.

David took the pad and cinched it on the back of the stallion.

"And when Shakra began to gallop," said the negro, "Benjamin cried out."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Zacharias, men do not cry out without speaking."

"Nevertheless," said Zacharias, "it was like the cry of a wolf when they hunt along the cliffs in winter and see the young horses and the cattle in the Garden below them. It was a cry, and there was no spoken word in it."

The master bit his lip.

"Abraham has been talking folly to you," he said; and, springing on the back of the stallion, he raced out of the *patio* and on to the south road with his long, black hair whipping straight out behind his head.

At length the southern wall rose slowly over the trees, and a deep murmur which had begun about them as soon as they left the house, light as the humming of bees, increasing as they went down the valley, now became a great rushing noise. It was like a great wind in sound; one expected the push of a gale, coming out from the trees, but there was only the river which

ran straight at the cliff, split solid rock, and shot out of sunlight into a black cavern. Beside this gaping mouth of rock stood Connor with Shakra beside him. Twice the master called, but Connor could not hear.

The tumbling river would have drowned a valley of musketry. Only when David touched his shoulder did Connor turn a gloomy face. They took their horses across the bridge which passed over the river a little distance from the cliff, and rode down the farther side of the valley until the roar sank behind them. A few barriers of trees reduced it to the humming which on windless days was picked up by echoes and reached the house of David with a solemn murmur.

"I thought you would rest," said David, when they were come to a place of quiet, and the horses cantered lightly over the road with that peculiar stride, at once soft and reaching, which Connor was beginning to see as the chief characteristic of the Eden Gray.

"I have rested more in two minutes on the back of Shakra than I could rest in two hours on my bed."

It was like disarming a father by praise of his son.

"She has a gentle gait," smiled David.

"I tell you, man, she's a knockout!"

"A knockout?"

The gambler added hastily: "Next to Glani the best horse I have seen."

"You are right. Next to Glani the best in the valley."

"In the world," said Connor, and then gave a cry of wonder.

They had come through an avenue of the eucalyptus trees, and now they reached an open meadow, beyond which aspens trembled and flashed silver under a shock from the wind. Half the meadow was black, half green; for one of the old negroes was plowing. He turned a rich furrow behind him, and the blackbirds followed in chattering swarms in their hunt for worms. The plow team was a span of slender-limbed Eden Grays. They walked lightly with plow, shaking their heads at the blackbirds, and sometimes they touched noses in that cheery, dumb conversation of horses. The

plow turned down the field with the sod curling swiftly behind. The blackbirds followed. There were soldier-wings among them making flashes of red, and all the swarm scolded.

"David," said Connor when he could speak, "you might as well harness lighting to your plow. Why in the name of God, man, don't you get mules for this work?"

The master looked to the ground, for he was angered.

"It is not against His will that I work them at the plow," he answered. "He has not warned me against it."

"Who hasn't?"

"Our Father whose name you spoke. Look! They are not unhappy, Jurith and Rajima, of the blood of Aliriz."

He whistled, whereat the off mare tossed her head and whinnied.

"By Heaven, she knows you at this distance!" gasped Connor.

"Which is only to say that she is not a fool. Did I not sit with her three days and three nights when she was first foaled? That was twenty-five years ago; I was a child then."

Connor, staring after the high, proud head of Jurith, sighed. The horses started on at a walk which was the least excellent gait in the Eden Grays. Their high croups and comparatively low withers, their long hindlegs and the shorter forelegs, gave them a waddling motion with the hind quarters apparently huddling the forehead along.

Indeed, they seemed designed in every particular for the gallop alone. But Glani was an exception. Just as in size he appeared a freak among the others, so in his gaits all things were perfectly proportioned. Connor, with a deep, quiet delight, watched the big stallion stepping freely. Shakra had to break into a soft trot now and then to catch up.

"Let us walk," said David. "The run is for when a man feels with the hawk in the sky; the gallop is for idle pleasure; the trot is an ugly gait, for distance only; but a walk is the gait when two men speak together. In this manner Matthew and I went up and down the valley roads. Alas, it is five years since I have walked my

horse! Is it not, Glani, my king? And now, Benjamin, tell me your trouble."

"There is no trouble," said Connor.

But David smiled, saying: "We are brothers in Glani, Benjamin. To us alone he has given his head. Therefore speak freely."

"Look back," said Connor, feeling that the crisis had come and that he must now put his fortune to the touch.

David turned on the stallion. "What do you see?"

"I see old Elijah. He drives the two mares, and the furrow follows them—the blackbirds also."

"Do you see nothing else?"

"I see the green meadow and the sky with a cloud in it; I see the river yonder and the aspens flash as the wind strikes them."

"And do you hear nothing?"

"I hear the falling of the Jordan and the cry of the birds. Also, Elijah has just spoken to Rajima. Ah, she is lazy for a daughter of Aliriz!"

"Do you wish to know what I see and hear, David?"

"If it is your pleasure, brother."

"I see a blue sky like this, with the wind and the clouds in it and all that stuff—"

"All of what?"

"And I see also," continued Connor, resolving to watch his tongue, "thousands of people, acres of men and women."

David was breathless with interest. He had a way of opening his eyes and his mind like a child.

"We are among them; they jostle us; we can scarcely breathe. There is a green lawn below us; we cannot see the green, it is so thickly covered with men. They have pulled out their wallets and they have money in their hands."

"What is it?" muttered David. "For my thoughts swim in those waves of faces."

"I see," went on Connor, "a great oval road fenced on each side, with colored posts at intervals. I see horses in a line, dancing up and down, turning about—"

"Ah, horses!"

"Kicking at each other."

"So? Are there such bad manners among them?"

"But what each man is trembling for, and what each man has risked his money upon, is this question: Which of all those is the fastest horse? Think! The horses which fret in that line are the finest money can buy. Their blood lines are longer than the blood lines of kings. They are all fine muscles and hair-trigger nerves. They are poised for the start. And now—"

"Benjamin, is there such love of horses over the mountains? Listen! Fifty thousand men and women breathe with those racers."

"I know." There was a glint in the eyes of David. "When two horses match their speed—"

"Some men have wagered all their money. They have borrowed, they have stolen, to get what they bet. But there are two men only who bet on one of the horses. You, David, and I!"

"Ha? But money is hard to come by."

"We ask them the odds," continued Connor. "For one dollar we shall take a hundred if our horse wins—odds of a hundred to one! And we wager. We wager the value of all we have. We wager the value of the Garden of Eden itself!"

"It is madness, Benjamin!"

"Look closer! See them at the post. There's the Admirál. There's Fidgety—that tall chestnut. There's Glorious Polly—the little bay. The greatest stake horses in the country. The race of the year. But the horse we bet on, David, is a horse which none of the rest in that crowd knows. It is a horse whose pedigree is not published. It is a small horse, not more than fourteen-three. It stands perfectly still in the midst of that crowd of nervous racers. On its back is an old negro."

"But can the horse win? And who is the negro?"

"On the other horses are boys who have starved until they are wisps with only hands for the reins of a horse and knees to keep on his back. They have stirrups so short that they seem to be floating above the racers. But on the back of the horse on which we are betting there is only an old, old negro, sitting heavily."

"His name! His name!" David cried.

"Elijah! And the horse is Jurith!"

"No, no! Withdraw the bets! She is old."

"They are off! The gray mare is not trained for the start. She is left standing far behind."

"Ah!" David groaned.

"Fifty thousand people laughing at the old gray mare left at the post!"

"I see it! I hear it!"

"She's too short in front; too high behind. She's a joke horse. And see the picture horses! Down the back stretch! The fifty thousand have forgotten the gray, even to laugh at her. The pack drives into the home stretch. There's a straight road to the finish. They straighten out. They get their feet. They're off for the wire!"

The voice of Connor had risen to a shrill cry. "But look! Look! There's a streak of gray coming around the turn. It's the mare! It's old Jurith!"

"Jurith!"

"No awkwardness now! She spreads herself out and the posts disappear beside her. She stretches down low and the rest come back to her. Fine horses; they run well. But Jurith is a racing machine. She's on the hip of the pack! Look at the old negro all the thousand were laughing at. He sits easily in the saddle. He has no whip. His reins are loose. And then he uses the posts ahead of him. He leans over and speaks one word in the ear of the gray mare.

"By the Lord, she was walking before; she was cantering! Now she runs! Now she runs! And the fifty thousand are dumb, white. A solid wall of faces covered with whitewash! D'you see? They're sick! And then all at once they know they're seeing a miracle. They have been standing up ever since the horses entered the home-stretch. Now they climb on one another's shoulders. They forget all about thousands—the hundred of thousands of dollars which they are going to lose. They only know that they are seeing a great horse. And they love that new, great horse. They scream as they see her come. Women break into tears as the old negro shoots past the grandstand. Men shriek and hug each other. They dance.

"The gray streaks shoots on. She is past the others. She is rushing for the finish wire as no horse ever ran before. She is away. One length, two lengths, six lengths of daylight show between her and the rest. She gallops past the finish posts with Elijah looking back at the others!

"She has won! You have won, David. I have won. We are rich. Happy. The world's before us. David, do you see?"

"Is it possible? But no, Benjamin, not Jurith. Some other, perhaps. Shakra—Glani—"

"No, we would take Jurith—twenty-five years old!"

Connor's last words trailed off into hysterical laughter.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TEMPTING.

DAVID was still flushed with the excitement of the tale, and he was perplexed and troubled when Connor's strange, high laughter brought to an abrupt end the picture they had both lived in.

The gambler saw the frown on David's brow, and with an effort he made himself suddenly grave, though he was still pale and shaking.

"David, this is the reason Jurith can win. Somewhere in the past there was a freak gray horse. There are other kinds of freaks; oranges had seeds in 'em; all at once up pops a tree that has seedless fruit. People plant shoots from it. There you have the naval orange, all out of one tree. It's the same way with that gray horse. It was a freak; had a high croup and muscles as stretchy as India-rubber, and strong—like the difference between the muscles of a mule and the muscles of most horses. That's what that first horse was. He was bred and the get came into this valley. They kept improving—and the result is Glani! The Eden Gray, David, is the finest horse in the world because it's a *different* and a better horse!"

The master paused for some time, and Connor knew he was deep in thought. Finally he spoke:

"But if we know the speed of the Eden

Grays, why should we go out into the world and take the money of other men because they do not know how fast our horses run?"

Connor made sure the master was serious and nerved himself for the second effort.

"What do you wish, David?"

"In what measure, Benjamin?"

"The sky's the limit! I say, what do you wish? The last wish that was in your head."

"Shakra stumbled a little while ago; I wished for a smother road."

"David, with the money we win on the tracks we'll tear up these roads, cut trenches, fill 'em with solid blocks of rock, lay 'em over with asphalt, make 'em as smooth as glass! What else?"

"You jest, Benjamin. That is a labor for a thousand men."

"I say, it's nothing to what we'll do. What else do you want? Turn your mind loose—open up your eyes and see something that's hard to get."

"Every wish is a regret, and why should I fail of gratitude to God by making my wishes? Yet, I have been weak, I confess. I have sometimes loathed the crumbling walls of my house. I have wished for a tall chamber—on the floor a covering which makes no sound colors about me—crystal vases for my flowers—music when I come—"

"Stop there! You see that big white cliff? I'll have that stone cut in chunks as big as you and your horse put together. I'll have 'em piled on a foundation as strong as the bottom of those hills. You see the way those mountain-tops walk into the sky? That's how the stairways will step up to the front of your house and put you out on a big terrace with columns scooting up fifty feet, and when you walk across the terrace a couple of great big doors weighing about a ton apiece will drift open and make a whisper when you mosey in. And when you get inside you'll start looking up and up, but you'll get dizzy before your eyes hit the ceiling; and up there you'll see a lighting stunt that looks like a million icicles with the sun behind 'em."

He paused an instant for breath and saw David smiling in a hazy pleasure.

"I follow you," he said softly. "Go

on!" And his hand stretched out as though to open a door.

"What I've told you about is only a beginning. Turn yourself loose; dream, and I'll turn your dream into stone and color, and fill up your windows with green and gold and red glass till you'll think a rainbow has got all tangled up there! I'll give you music that'll make you forget to think, and when you think I'll give you a room so big that you'll have silence with an echo to it."

"All this for my horses?"

"Send one of the grays—just one, and let me place the wagers. You don't even have to risk your own money. I've made a slough of it betting on things that weren't lead pipe cinches like this. I made on Fidgety Midget at fifty to one. I made on Gosham at eight to one. Nobody told me how to bet on 'em. I know a horse—that's all! You stay in the Garden; I take one of the grays; I bring her back in six months with more coin than she can pack, and we split it fifty-fifty. You furnish the horse. I furnish the jack. Is it a go?"

A bird stopped above them, whistled and dipped away over the tree-tops. David turned his head to follow the trailing song, and Connor realized with a sick heart that he had failed to sweep his man off his feet.

"Would you have me take charity?" asked David at length.

It seemed to Connor that there was a smile behind this. He himself burst into a roar of laughter.

"Sure, it sounds like charity. They'll be making you a gift right enough. There isn't a horse on the turf that has a chance with one of the grays! But they'll bet their money like fools."

"Would it not be a sin, then?"

"What sin?" asked Connor roughly. "Don't they grab the coin of other people? Does the bookie ask you how much coin you have and if you can afford to lose it? No, he's out to get all that he can grab. And we'll go out and do some grabbing in turn. Oh, they'll squeal when we turn the screw, but they'll kick through with the jack. No fear, Davie!"

"Whatever sins may be theirs, Benjamin, those sins need not be mine."

Connor was dumb.

"Because they are foolish," said David, "should I take advantage of their folly? A new man comes into the valley. He sees Jurith, and notices that she runs well in spite of her years. He says to me: 'This mare will run faster than your stallion. I have money and this ring upon my finger which I will risk against one dollar of your money; if the mare beats Glani I take your dollar. If Glani beats the mare, you take my purse and my ring; I have no other wealth. It will ruin me, but I am willing to be ruined if Jurith is not faster than Glani.'

"Suppose such foolish man were to come to me, Benjamin, would I not say to him: 'No, my friend. For I understand better than you, both Jurith and Glani!' Tell me therefore, Benjamin, that you have tempted me toward a sin, unknowing."

It made Connor think of the stubbornness of a woman, or of a priest. It was a quiet assurance which could only be paralleled from a basis of religion or instinct. He knew the danger of pressing too hard upon this instinct or blind faith. He swallowed an oath, and answered, remembering dim lessons out of his childhood:

"Tell me, David, my brother, is there no fire to burn fools? Is there no rod for the shoulders of the proud? Should not such men be taught?"

"And I say to you, Benjamin," said the master of the Garden: "what wrong have these fools done to me with their folly?"

Connor felt that he was being swept beyond his depth. The other went on, changing his voice to gentleness:

"No, no! I have even a kindness for men with such blind faith in their horses. When Jacob comes to me and says privately in my ear: 'David, look at Hira. Is she not far nobler and wiser than Ephraim's horse, Numan?' When he says this to me, do I shake my head and frown and say: 'Risk the clothes on your back and the food you eat to prove what you say.' No, assuredly I do neither of these things, but I put my hand on his shoulder and I say: 'He who has faith shall do great things; and a tender master makes a strong cold.' In this manner I speak to him,

knowing that truth is good, but the whole truth is sometimes a fire that purifies, perhaps, but it also destroys. So Jacob goes smiling on his way and gives kind words and fine oats to Hira."

Connor turned the flank of this argument.

"These men are blind. You say that your horses can run a mile in such and such a time, and they shrug their shoulders and answer that they have heard such chatter before—from trainers and stable boys. But you put your horse on a race track and prove what you say, and they pay for knowledge. Once they see the truth they come to value your horses. You open a stud and your breed is crossed with theirs. The blood of Rustir, passing through the blood of Glani, goes among the best horses of the world. A hundred years from now there will be no good horse in the world, of which men do not ask: 'Is the blood of Glani in him? Is he of the line of the Eden Grays?' Consider that, David!"

He found the master of the Garden frowning. He pressed home the point with renewed vigor.

"If you live in this valley, David, what will men know of you?"

"Have you come to take me out of the Garden of Eden?"

"I have come to make your influence pass over the mountains while you stay here. A hundred years from now who will know David of the Garden of Eden? Of the men who used to live here, who remains? Not one! Where do they live now? Inside your head, inside your head, David, and no other place!"

"They live with God," said David hoarsely.

"But here on earth they don't live at all except in your mind. And when you die, they die with you. But if you let me do what I say, a thousand years from today, people will be saying: 'There was a man named David, and he had these gray horses, which were the finest in the world, and he gave their blood to the world.' They'll pick up every detail of your life, and they'll trace back the horses—"

"Do I live for the sake of a horse?" cried David, in a voice unnaturally high.

"No, but because of your horses the world will ask what sort of a man you are. People will follow your example. They'll build a hundred Gardens of Eden. Every one of those valleys will be full of the memories of David and the men who went before him. Then, David, you'll never die!"

It was the highest flight to which Connor's eloquence ever attained. The results were alarming. David spoke, without facing his companion, thoughtfully.

"Benjamin, I have been warned. By sin the gate to the Garden was opened, and perhaps sin has entered in you. For why did the first men withdraw to this valley, led by John, save to live apart, perfect lives? And you, Benjamin, wish to undo all that they accomplished."

"Only the horses," said the gambler. "Who spoke of taking you out of the Garden?"

Still David would not look at him.

"God grant me His light," said the master sadly. "You have stirred and troubled me. If the horses go, my mind goes with them. Benjamin, you have tempted me. Yet another thing is in my mind. When Matthew came to die he took me beside him and said:

"David, it is not well that you should lead a lonely life. Man is made to live, and not to die. Take to yourself a woman, when I am gone, wed her, and have children, so that the spirit of John and Matthew and Luke and Paul shall not die. And do this in your youth, before five years have passed you by."

"So spoke Matthew, and this is the fifth year. And perhaps the Lord works in you to draw me out, that I may find this woman. Or perhaps it is only a spirit of evil that speaks in you. How shall I judge? For my mind whirles!"

As if to flee from his thoughts, the master of the Garden called on Glani, and the stallion broke into a full gallop. Shakra followed at a pace that took the breath of Connor, but instantly she began to fall behind; before they had reached the lake Glani was out of sight across the bridge.

Full of alarm—full of hope also—Connor reached the house. In the *patio* he

found Zacharias standing with folded arms before a door.

"I must find David at once," he told the negro. "Where has he gone?"

"Up," said the servant, and pointed solemnly above him.

"Nonsense!" He added impatiently: "Where shall I find him, Zacharias?"

But again the negro waved to the blue sky.

"His body is in this room, but his mind is with Him above the world."

There was something in this that made Connor uneasy as he had never been before.

"You may go into any room save the Room of Silence," continued Zacharias, "but into this room only David and the four before him have been. This is the holy place."

CHAPTER XVIII.

VICTORY.

GLANI waited in the *patio* for the re-appearance of the master, and as Connor paced with short, nervous steps on the grass at every turn he caught the flash of the sun on the stallion. Above his selfish greed he had one honest desire: he would have paid with blood to see the great horse face the barrier. That, however was beyond the reach of his ambition, and therefore the beauty of Glani was always a hopeless torment.

The quiet in the *patio* oddly increased his excitement. It was one of those bright, still days when the wind stirs only in soft breaths, bringing a sense of the open sky. Sometimes the breeze picked up a handful of drops from the fountain and showered it with a cool rustling on the grass. Sometimes it flared the tail of Glani; sometimes the shadow of the great eucalyptus which stood west of the house quivered on the turf.

Connor found himself looking minutely at trivial things, and in the meantime David Eden in his room was deciding the fate of the American turf. Even Glani seemed to know, for his glance never stirred from the door through which the master had

disappeared. What a horse the big fellow was! He thought of the stallion in the paddock at the track. He heard the thousands swarm and the murmur which comes deep out of a man's throat when he sees a great horse.

The palms of Connor were wet with sweat. He kept rubbing them dry on the hips of his trousers. Rehearsing his talk with David, he saw a thousand flaws, and a thousand openings which he had missed. Then all thought stopped; David had come out into the *patio*.

He came straight to Connor, smiling, and he said:

"The words were a temptation, but the mind that conceived them was not the mind of a tempter."

Ineffable assurance and good will shone in his face, and Connor cursed him silently.

"I, leaving the valley, might be lost in the torrent. And neither the world nor I should profit. But if I stay here, at least one soul is saved to God."

"Your own?" muttered Connor. But he managed to smile above his rage. "And after you," he concluded, "what of the horses, David?"

"My sons shall have them."

"And if you have no sons?"

"Before my death I shall kill all of the horses. They are not meant for other men than the sons of David."

The gambler drew off his hat and raised his face to the sky, asking mutely if Heaven would permit this crime.

"Yet," said David, "I forgive you."

"You forgive me?" echoed Connor through his teeth.

"Yes, for the fire of the temptation has burned out. Let us forget the world beyond the mountains."

"What is your proof that you are right in staying here?"

"The voice of God."

"You have spoken to Him, perhaps?"

The irony passed harmless by the raised head of David.

"I have spoken to Him," he asserted calmly.

"I see," nodded the gambler. "You keep Him in that room, no doubt?"

"It is true. His spirit is in the Room of Silence."

"You've seen His face?"

A numbness fell on the mind of Connor as he saw his hopes destroyed by the demon of bigotry.

"Only His voice has come to me," said David.

"It speaks to you?"

"Yes."

Connor stared in actual alarm, for this was insanity.

"The four," said David, "spoke to Him always in that room. He is there. And when Matthew died he gave me this assurance—that while the walls of this house stood together God would not desert me or fail to come to me in that room until I love another thing more than I love God."

"And how, David, do you hear the voice? For while you were there I was in the *patio*, close by, and yet I heard no whisper of a sound from the room."

"I shall tell you. When I entered the Room of Silence just now your words had set me on fire. My mind was hot with desire of power over other men. I forgot the palace you built for me with your promises. And then I knew that it had been a temptation to sin from which the voice was freeing me.

"Could a human voice have spoken more clearly than that voice spoke to my heart? Anxiously I called before my eyes the image of Benjamin to ask for His judgment, but your face remained an unclouded vision and was not dimmed by the will of the Lord as He dims creatures of evil in the Room of Silence. Thereby I knew that you are indeed my brother."

The brain of Connor groped slowly in the rear of these words. He was too stunned by disappointment to think clearly, but vaguely he made out that David had dismissed the argument and was now asking him to come for a walk by the lake.

"The lake's well enough," he answered, "but it occurs to me that I've got to get on with my journey."

"You must leave me?"

There was such real anxiety in his voice that Connor softened a little.

"I've got a lot to do," he explained. "I only stopped over to rest my nags, in the first place. Then this other idea came along, but since the voice has rapped it there's nothing for me to do but to get on my way again."

"It is a long trip?"

"Long enough."

"The Garden of Eden is a lonely place."

"You'll have the voice to cheer you up."

"The voice is an awful thing. There is no companionship in it. This thought comes to me. Leave the mule and the horse. Take Shakra. She will carry you swiftly and safely over the mountains and bring you back again. And I shall be happy to know that she is with you while you are away. Then go, brother, if you must, and return in haste."

It was the opening of the gates of heaven to Connor at the very moment when he had surrendered the last hope. He heard David call the servants, heard an order to bring Shakra saddled at once. The canteen, was being filled for the journey. Into the incredulous mind of the gambler the truth filtered by degrees, as candlelight probes a room full of treasure, flashing ever and anon into new corners filled with undiscovered riches.

Shakra was his to ride over the mountains. And why stop there? There was no mark on her, and his brand would make her his. She would be safe in an Eastern racing stable before they even dreamed of pursuit. And when her victories on the track had built his fortune he could return her, and raise a breed of peerless horses. A theft? Yes, but so was the stealing of the fire from heaven for the use of mankind.

He would have been glad to leave the Garden of Eden at once, but that was not in David's scheme of things. To him a departure into the world beyond the mountains was as a voyage into an uncharted sea. His dignity kept him from asking questions, but it was obvious that he was painfully anxious to learn the necessity of Connor's going.

That night in the *patio* he held forth at length of the things they would do to-

gether when the gambler returned. "The Garden is a book," he explained. "And I must teach you to turn the pages and read in them."

There was little sleep for Connor that night. He lay awake, turning over the possibilities of a last minute failure, and when he finally dropped into a deep, aching slumber it was to be awakened almost at once by the voice of David calling in the *patio*. He wakened and found it was the pink of the dawn.

"Shakra waits at the gate of the *patio*. Start early, Benjamin, and thereby you will return soon."

It brought Connor to his feet with a leap. As if he required urging! Through the hasty breakfast he could not retain his joyous laughter until he saw David growing thoughtful. But that breakfast was over, and David's kind solicitations, at length. Shakra was brought to him; his feet were settled into the stirrups, and the dream changed to a sense of the glorious reality. She was his—Shakra!

"A journey of happiness for your sake and a speed for mine, Benjamin."

Connor looked down for the last time into the face of the master of the Garden, half wild and half calm—the face of a savage with the mind of a man behind it. "If he should take my trail!" he thought with horror.

"Good-by!" he called aloud, and in a burst of joy and sudden compunction, "God bless you, David!"

"He has blessed me already, for He has given to me a friend."

A touch of the rope—for no Eden Gray would endure a bit—whirled Shakra and sent her down the terraces like the wind. The avenue of the eucalyptus trees poured behind them, and out of this, with astonishing suddenness, they reached the gate.

The fire already burned, for the night was hardly past, and Joseph squatted like a great ape, with the thin smoke blowing across his face unheeded. He was grinning with savage hatred and the thick lips were muttering.

Connor knew what profound curse was being called down upon his head, but he had only a careless glance for Joseph. His

eye up yonder where the full morning shone on the mountains, his mind was out in the world, at the race track, seeing in prospect beautiful Shakra fleeing away from the finest of the thoroughbreds. And he saw the face of Ruth, as her eyes would light at the sight of Shakra. He could have burst into song.

Indeed, all the destiny of the two races, white and black, was in that picture, Connor looking forward, high-headed, and the negro crouched with the smoke drifting in his face. The gambler threw up his arm with a low shout, and Shakra burst into full gallop down the ravine.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VELVET TOUCH.

WHEN Ruth Manning read the note through for the first time she raised her glance to the bearer. The boy was so sun-blackened that the paler skin of the eyelids made his eyes seem supremely large. He was now poised accurately on one foot, rubbing his calloused heel up and down his skin, while he drank in the particulars of the telegraph office. He could hardly be a party to a deception. She looked over the note again, and read:

DEAR MISS MANNING:

I am a couple of miles out of Lukin, in a place to which the bearer of this note will bring you. I am sure you will come, for I am in trouble, out of which you can very easily help me. It is a matter which I cannot confide to any other person in Lukin. I am impatiently expecting you.

BEN CONNOR.

She crumpled the note in her hand thoughtfully, but, on the verge of dropping it in the waste basket, she smoothed it again, and for the third time went over the contents. Then she rose abruptly and confided her place to the lad who idled at the counter.

"The wire's dead," she told him. "Besides, I'll be back in an hour or so."

And she rode off a moment later with the boy. He had a blanket-pad without stirrups, and he kept prodding the sliding elbows of the horse with his bare toes while

he chattered at Ruth, for the drum of the sounder had fascinated him and he wanted it explained. She listened to him with a smile of inattention, for she was thinking busily of Connor. Those thoughts made her look down to the dust that puffed up from the feet of the horses and became a light mist behind them; then, raising her head, she saw the blue ravines of the farther mountains and the sun haze about the crests. Connor had always been to her as the ship is to a traveler; the glamour of strange places was about him.

Presently they left the trail, and passing about a hillside, came to an old shack whose unpainted wood had blackened with time.

"There he is," said the boy, and waving his hand to her, turned his pony on the back trail at a gallop.

Connor called to her from the shack and came to meet her, but she had dismounted before he could reach the stirrup. He kept her hand in his for a moment as he greeted her. It surprised him to find how glad he was to see her. He told her so frankly.

"After the mountains and all that," he said cheerfully, "it's like meeting an old chum again to see you. How have things been going?"

This direct friendliness in a young man was something new to the girl. The youths who came in to the dances at Lukin were an embarrassed lot who kept a sulky distance, as though they made it a matter of pride to show that they were able to resist the attraction of a pretty girl. But if she gave them the least encouragement, the merest shadow of a friendly smile, they were at once all eagerness. They would flock around her, sending savage glances at one another, and simpering foolishly at her. They had stock conversation of politeness; they forced out prodigious compliments to an accompaniment of much writhing. Social conversation was a torture to them, and the girl knew it.

Not that she despised them. She understood perfectly well that most of them were fine fellows and strong men. But their talents had been cultivated in roping two-year-olds and bulldogging yearlings. They could encounter the rush of a mad bull far more easily than they could withstand a verbal

quip. With the familiarity of years, she knew, they lost both their sullenness and their starched politeness. They became kindly, gentle men with infinite patience, infinite devotion to their "womenfolk." Homelier girls in Lukin had an easier time with them. But in the presence of Ruth Manning, who was a more or less celebrated beauty, they were a hopeless lot. In short, she had all her life been in an amphibious position, of the mountain desert and yet not of the mountain desert. On the one hand she despised the "slick dudes" who now and again drifted into Lukin with marvelous neckties and curiously patterned clothes; on the other hand, something in her revolted at the thought of becoming one of the "womenfolk."

As a matter of fact there are two things which every young girl should have. The first is the presence of a mother, which is the oldest of truisms; the second is the friendship of at least one man of nearly her own age. Ruth had neither. That is the crying hurt of Western life. The men are too busy to bother with women until the need for a wife and a home and children, and all the physical destiny of a man, overwhelms them. When they reach this point there is no selection. The first girl they meet they make love to.

And most of this Ruth understood. She wanted to make some of those lumbering, fearless, strong-handed, gentle-souled men her friends. But she dared not make the approaches. The first kind word or the first winning smile brought forth a volley of tremendous compliments, close on the heels of which followed the heavy artillery of a proposal of marriage. No wonder that she was rejoiced beyond words to meet this frank friendliness in Ben Connor. And what a joy to be able to speak back freely, without putting a guard over eyes and voice!

"Things have gone on just the same—but I've missed you a lot!"

"That's good to hear."

"You see," she explained, "I've been living in Lukin with just half a mind—the rest of it has been living off the wire. And you're about the only interesting thing that's come to me except in the Morse."

And what a happiness to see that there was no stiffening of his glance as he tried to read some profound meaning into her words! He accepted them as they were, with a good-natured laughter that warmed her heart.

"Sit down over here," he went on, spreading a blanket over a chairlike arrangement of two boulders. "You look tired out."

She accepted with a smile, and letting her head go back against the upper edge of the blanket she closed her eyes for a moment and permitted her mind to drift into utter relaxation.

"I *am* tired," she whispered. It was inexpressibly pleasant to lie there with the sense of being guarded by this man. "They never guess how tired I get—never—never! I feel—I feel—as if I were living under the whip all the time."

"Steady up, partner." He had picked up that word in the mountains, and he liked it. "Steady, partner. Everybody has to let yourself go and tell me what's wrong. I may not be able to fix anything, but it always helps to let off steam."

She heard him sit down beside her, and for an instant, though her eyes were still closed, she stiffened a little, fearful that he would touch her hand, attempt a caress. Any other man in Lukin would have become familiar long ago. But Connor did not attempt to approach her.

"Turn and turn about," he was saying smoothly. When I went into your telegraph office the other night my nerves were in a knot. Tell you straight I never knew I *had* real nerves before. I went in ready to curse like a drunk. When I saw you, it straightened me out. By the Lord, it was like a cool wind in my face. You were so steady, Ruth; straight eyes; and it ironed out the wrinkles to hear your voice. I blurted out a lot of stuff. But when I remembered it later on I wasn't ashamed. I knew you'd understand. Besides, I knew that what I'd said would stop with you. Just about one girl in a million who can keep her mouth shut—and each one of 'em is worth her weight in gold. You did me several thousand dollars' worth of good that night. That's honest!"

She allowed her eyes to open, slowly, and

looked at him with a misty content. The mountains had already done him good. The sharp sun had flushed him a little and tinted his cheeks and strong chin with tan. He looked more manly, somehow, and stronger in himself. Of course he had flattered her, but the feeling that she had actually helped him so much by merely listening on that other night awakened in her a new self-reverence. She was too prone to look on life as a career of manlike endeavor; it was pleasant to know that a woman could accomplish something even more important by simply sitting still and listening. He was watching her gravely now, even though she permitted herself the luxury of smiling at him.

All at once she cried softly: "Thank Heaven that you're not a fool, Ben Connor!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't think I can tell you." She added hastily: "I'm not trying to be mysterious."

He waved the need of an apology away.

"Tell you what. Never knew a girlie yet that was worth her salt who could be understood all the time, or who even understood herself."

She closed her eyes again to ponder this, lazily. She could not arrive at a conclusion, but she did not care. Missing links in this conversation were not vitally important.

"Take it easy, Ruth; we'll talk later on," he said after a time.

She did not look at him as she answered: "Tell me why?"

There was a sort of childlike confiding in all this that troubled Ben Connor. He had seen her with a mind as direct and an enthusiasm as strong as that of a man. This relaxing and softening alarmed him, because it showed him another side of her, a new and vital side. She was very lovely with the shadows of the sombrero brim cutting across the softness of her lips and setting aglow the clear olive tan of her chin and throat. Her hand lay palm upward beside her, very small, very delicate in the making. But what a power was in that hand! He realized with a thrill of not unmixed pleasure that if the girl set herself to the task

she could mold him like wax with the gestures of that hand. If into the softness of her voice she allowed a single note of warmth to creep, what would happen in Ben Connor? He felt within himself a chord ready to vibrate in answer.

Now he caught himself leaning a little closer to study the purple stain of weariness in her eyelids. Even exhaustion was attractive in her. It showed something new, and newly appealing. Weariness gave merely a new edge to her beauty. What if her eyes, opening slowly now, were to look upon him not with the gentleness of friendship, but with something more—the little shade of difference in a girl's wide eyes that admits a man to her secrets—and traps him in so doing.

Ben Connor drew himself up with a shake of the shoulders. He felt that he must keep careful guard from now on. What a power she was. What a power! If she set herself to the task who could deal with her? What man could keep from her? Then the picture of David jumped into his mind out of nothingness. And on the heels of that picture the inspiration always come a sudden uplifting of the heart, surety, intoxicating insight. He wanted to jump to his feet and shout until the great ravine beneath them echoed. With an effort he remained quiet. But he was thinking rapidly—rapidly. He had intended to use her merely to arrange for shipping Shakra away from Lukin Junction. For he dared not linger about the town where expert horse thieves might see the mare. But now something new, something more came to him. The girl was a power? Why not use her?

What he said was: "Do you know why you close your eyes?"

Still without looking up she answered: "Why?"

"All of these mountains—you see?" She did not see, so he went on to describe them. "There's that big peak opposite us. Looks a hundred yards away, but it's two miles. Come down in big jags and walks up into the sky—Lord knows how many thousand feet. And behind it the other ranges stepping off into the horizon with purple in the gorges and mist at the tops. Fine picture, eh? But hard to look at, Ruth. Mighty

hard to look at. First thing you know you get to squinting to make out whether that's a cactus on the side of that mountain or a hundred-foot pine tree. Might be either. Can't tell the distance in this air. Well, you begin to squint. That's how the people around here get that long-distance look behind their eyes and the long-distance wrinkles around the corners of their eyes. All the men have those wrinkles. But the women have them, too, after a while. You'll get them after a while, Ruth. Wrinkles around the eyes and wrinkles in the mind to match, eh?"

Her eyes opened at last, slowly, slowly. She smiled at him plaintively.

"Don't I know, Ben? It's a man's country. It isn't made for woman."

"Ah, there you've hit the nail on the head. Exactly! A man's country. Do you know what it does to the women?"

"Tell me."

"Makes 'em like the men. Hardens their hands after a while. Roughens their voices. Takes time, but that's what comes after a while. Understand?"

"Oh, don't I understand!"

And he knew how the fear had haunted her, then, for the first time.

"What does this dry, hot wind do to you in the mountains? What does it do to your skin? Takes the velvet off, after a while; makes it dry and hard. Lord, girl, I'd hate to see the change it's going to make in you!"

All at once she sat up, wide awake.

"What are you trying to do to me, Ben Connor?"

"I'm trying to wake you up."

"I am awake. But what can I do?"

"You think you're awake, but you're not. Tell you what a girl needs, a stage—just like an actor. Think they can put on a play with these mountains for a setting? Never in the world. Make the actors look too small. Make everything they say sound too thin.

"Same way with a girl. She needs a setting. A room, a rug, a picture, a comfortable chair, and a dress that goes with it. Shuts out the rest of the world and gives her a chance to make a man focus on her—see her behind the footlights. See?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Do you know what I've been doing while I watched you just now?"

"Tell me."

He was fighting for a great purpose now, and a quality of earnest emotion crept into his voice. "Around your throat I've been running an edging of yellow old lace. Under your hand that was lying there I put a deep blue velvet; I had your shoulders as white as snow, with a flash to 'em like snow when you turned in the light; I had you proud as a queen, Ruth, with a blur of violets at your breast. I took out the tired look in your face. Instead, I put in happiness."

He stopped and drew a long breath.

"You're pretty now, but you could be—beautiful. Lord, what a flame of a beauty you could be, girl!"

Instead of flushing and smiling under the praise, he saw tears well into her eyes and her mouth grow tremulous. She winked the tears away.

"What are you trying to do, Ben? Make everything still harder for me? Don't you see I'm helpless—helpless?"

And instead of rising to a wail her voice sank away at the end in despair.

"Oh, you're trapped well enough," he said. "I'm going to bust the trap! I'm going to give you your setting. I'm going to make you what you ought to be—beautiful!"

She smiled at any unreal fairy tale.

"How?"

"I can show you better than I can tell you! Come here!" He rose, and she was on her feet in a flash. He led the way to the door of the shack, and as the shadows fell inside, Shakra tossed up her head.

The girl's bewildered joy was as great as if the horse were a present to her.

"Oh, you beauty, you beauty," she cried.

"Watch yourself," he warned. "She's as wild as a mountain lion."

"But she knows a friend!"

Shakra sniffed the outstretched hand, and then with a shake of her head accepted the stranger and looked over Ruth's shoulder at Connor as though for an explanation. Connor himself was smiling and excited; he drew her back and forgot to release her hand, so that they stood like two happy

children together. He spoke very softly and rapidly, as though he feared to embarrass the mare.

"Look at the head first—then the bone in the foreleg, then the length above her back—see how she stands! See how she stands! And those black hoofs, hard as iron, I tell you—put the four of 'em in my double hands, almost—ever see such a nick? But she's no six furlong flash! That chest, eh? Run your finger-tips down that shoulder!"

She turned with tears of pleasure in her eyes. "Ben Connor, you've been in the valley of the grays!"

"I have. And do you know what it means to us?"

"To us?"

"I said it. I mean it. You're going to share."

"I—"

"Look at that mare again!"

She obeyed.

"Say something, Ruth!"

"I can't say what I feel!"

"Then try to understand this: you're looking at the fastest horse that ever stepped into a race track. You understand? I'm not speaking in comparisons. I'm talking the cold dope! Here's a pony that could have given Salvador twenty pounds, run him sick in six furlongs, and walked away to the finish by herself. Here's a mare that could pick up a hundred and fifty pounds and beat the finest horse that ever faced a barrier with a flyweight jockey in the saddle. You're looking at history, girl! Look again! You're looking at a cold million dollars. You're looking at the blood that's going to change the history of the turf. That's what Shakra means!"

She was trembling with his excitement.

"I see. It's the sure thing you were talking about. The horse that can't be beat—that makes the betting safe?"

But Connor grew gloomy at once.

"What do you mean by sure thing? If I could ever get her safely away from the post in a stake race, yes; sure as anything on earth. But suppose the train is wrecked? Suppose she puts a foot in a hole? Suppose at the post some rotten, cheap-selling plater kicks her and lays her up!"

He passed a trembling hand along the neck of Shakra.

"God, suppose!"

"But you only brought one; nothing else worth while in the valley?"

"Nothing else? I tell you, the place is full of 'em! And there's a stallion as much finer than Shakra as she's finer than that broken-down, low-headed, ewe-necked, straight-shouldered, roach-backed skate you have out yonder!"

"Mr. Connor, that's the best little pony in Lukin! But I know—compared with this—oh, to see her run, just once!"

She sighed, and as her glance fell Connor noted her pallor and her weariness. She looked up again, and the great eyes filled her face with loveliness. Color, too, came into her cheeks and into her parted lips.

"You beauty!" she murmured. "You perfect, perfect beauty!"

Shakra was nervous under the fluttering hands, but in spite of her uneasiness she seemed to enjoy the light-falling touches until the finger-tips trailed across her forehead; then she tossed her head high, and the girl stood beneath, laughing, delighted. Connor found himself smiling in sympathy. The two made a harmonious picture. As harmonious, say, as the strength of Glani and the strength of David Eden. His face grew tense with it when he drew the girl away.

"Would you like to have a horse like that—half a dozen like it?"

The first leap of hope was followed by a wan smile at this cruel mockery.

He went on with brutal tenseness, jabbing the points at her with his raised finger.

"And everything else you've ever wanted: swell clothes? Manhattan? A limousine as big as a house with a vase of flowers in it and everything? A butler behind your chair and a maid in your dressing room? A picture in the papers every time you turn around in your Newport cottage? You want 'em?"

"Do I want heaven?"

"How much will you pay?"

He urged it on her, towering over her as he drew close.

"What's it worth? Is it worth a fight?"

"It's worth—everything."

"I'm talking shop. I'm talking business. Will you play partners with me?"

"To the very end."

"The big negro doesn't own the grays in that valley they call the Garden of Eden. They're owned by a white man. They call him David Eden. And David Eden has never been out in the world. It's part of his creed not to. It's part of his creed, however, to go out just once, find a woman for his wife, and bring her back with him. Is that clear?"

"I—"

"You're to go up there. That old gray gelding we saw in Lukin the day of the race. I'll finance you to the sky. Ride it to the gates of the Garden of Eden. Tell the guards that you've got to have another horse because the one you own is old. Insist on seeing David. Smile at 'em; win 'em over. Make them let you see David. And the minute you see him, he's ours! You understand? I don't mean marriage. One smile will knock him stiff. Then play him. Get him to follow you out of the valley. Tell him you have to go back home. He'll follow you. Once we have him outside you can keep him from going back and you can make him bring out his horses, too. Easy? It's a sure thing! We don't rob him, you see? We simply use his horses. I race them and play them. I split the winnings with you and David. Millions, I tell you; millions. Don't answer. Gimme a chance to talk!"

There was a rickety old box leaning against the wall; he made her sit on it, and dropping upon one knee, he poured out plan, reason, hopes, ambitions in fierce confusion. It ended logically enough. David was under what he considered a divine order to marry, and he would be clay in the hands of the first girl who met him. She would be a fool indeed if she were not able to lead him out of the valley.

"Think it over for one minute before you answer," concluded Connor, and then rose and folded his arms. He controlled his very breathing for fear of breaking in on the dream which he saw forming in her eyes.

Then she shook herself clear of the temptation.

"Ben, it's crooked! I'm to lie to him—live a lie until we have what we want!"

"God A'mighty, girl! Don't you see that we'd be doing the poor fathead a good turn by getting him out of his hermitage and letting him live in the world? A lie? Call it that if you want. Aren't there such things as white lies? If there are, this is one of 'em or I'm not Ben Connor."

His voice softened. "Why, Ruth, you know damned well that I wouldn't put the thing up to you if I didn't figure that in the end it would be the best thing in the world for you? I'm giving you your chance. To save Dave Eden from being a fossil. To earn your own freedom. To get everything you've longed for. Think!"

"I'm trying to think—but I only keep feeling, inside, 'It's wrong! It's wrong! It's wrong!' I'm not a moralizer, but—tell me about David Eden!"

Connor saw his opening.

"Think of a horse that's four years old and never had a bit in his teeth. That's David Eden. The minute you see him you'll want to tame him. But you'll have to go easy. Keep gloves on. He's as proud as a sulky kid. Kind of a chap you can't force a step, but you could coax him over a cliff. Why, he'd be thread for you to wind around your little finger if you worked him right. But it wouldn't be easy. If he had a single suspicion he'd smash everything in a minute, and he's strong enough to tear down a house. Put the temper of a panther in the size of a bear and you get a small idea of David Eden."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



AT THE FANCY FAIR

I MET her at a Fancy Fair

Behind a counter selling,
And what she wouldn't do or dare

There really is no telling.

Dear, artless creature, even now

Methinks your modest face I see—

When asked for change, you said, "Oh, how

Can you say 'change' to one like me?"

La Touche Hancock.

He was purposely making the task difficult and he saw that she was excited. His own work with Ruth Manning was as difficult as hers would be with David. The fickle color left her all at once and he found her looking wistfully at him.


She returned neither answer, argument, nor comment. In vain he detailed each step of her way into the Garden and how she could pass the gate. Sometimes he was not even sure that she heard him, as she listened to the silent voice which spoke against him. He had gathered all his energy for a last outburst, he was training his tongue for a convincing storm of eloquence, when Shakra, as though she wearied of all this human chatter, pushed in between them her beautiful head and went slowly toward Ruth with pricking ears, inquisitive, searching for those light, caressing touches.

The voice of Connor became an insidious whisper.

"Look at her, Ruth. Look at her. She's begging you to come. You can have her. She'll be a present to you. Quick! What's the answer!"

A strange answer! She threw her arms around the shoulder of the beautiful gray, buried her face in the mane, and burst into tears.

For a moment Connor watched her, dismayed, but presently, as one satisfied, he withdrew to the open air and mopped his forehead. It had been hard work, but it had paid. He looked over the distant blue waves of mountains with the eye of possession.



Amateur Night at Panther Peak

by James W. Egan

OF course there ain't supposed to be no such thing as luck. The wise galoots claim that layin' what happens to luck is just as foolish as expectin' good fellowship from a disrobin' rattler. Honest toil and square shootin' is the only things which brings you good fortune in this sterlin' world, they merrily squawk. Well, mebbe. But I been roamin' the ranges long enough to come to some conclusions and determinations of my own. And when I sees *hombres* which don't even know what is the wrong side of a hoss scoffin' regularly while a lotta better boys go minus the old grub you can't tell me there ain't no luck. I can prove different.

Right *pronto* and particular comes to mind this dude festive and frolickin' parents decided to call Oswald Applegrass. Nobody named nothin' like that oughta be lucky, but if the noble and quick-shootin' State of Montana ever sheltered a more fortunate buzzard than Oswald I'll make you a present of the soprano-singin' saddle-horn.

Oswald was a clerk in Panther Peak's one and only shoe store. I ain't got nothin' against shoe clerks on the whole. I realizes and appreciates that most people can't go around barefoot. Somebody has to sell 'em shoes. But I draws the line at Oswalds.

A pretty good share of the men folks in Panther Peak didn't lavish a wealth of love and affection on Mr. Applegrass, but I reckon Blister Burns and me had less use for this *hombre* than the rest of the burg packed in a bunch.

Blister and the party settin' down these lines was partners in the same oil well and girl. After several months' hard tryin' we had struck dog-gone little oil and seemed to be deadlocked with the lady. She liked Blister as well as me, and me as well as Blister—and didn't get too excited over either of us. Mebbe it was because we watched one another like a pair of trigger fighters attemptin' to get the drop. Not that we wasn't good friends in business hours. But Rose McIntyre was one of them girls who is so lurin' to the eyes that a *hombre* has to be mighty hard cooked to resist 'em. The minute you laid lamps on her you began to get a cravin' for a home and fireside. Blister and I felt the same way about it.

Naturally a young woman so good lookin' as Rose was bound to attract a lotta ambitious and admirin' galoots. However, Blister and I teamed up to discourage the opposition and narrow the field down to where we could battle it out ourselves. We got away with it until Jerry Nobson imported a shoe clerk and give Oswald Apple-

grass a chance to bust into the game. In less than no time Oswald was battin' high with the fair sex of Panther Peak. The shoe clerk slicked his hair back nice and stylish, shook a mean foot on the dance floor, and sang songs in a prohibition tenor. Several girls cast fond eyes his way, but he picked on Rose.

And somehow this dude made a hit with her. I've heard the first time he saw her he sang a song called "When You Look in the Heart of a Rose," and that it started him on his roseate way. At all events, he got in strong right sudden.

Before long Blister and me sees that we're in serious danger of bein' shoved into the discard, and we don't know what to do about it. Once in the dear dead days beyond recall but not recollection, when a man packed hardware on the hip and used it, we mighta forced Oswald outa the scenery. In these days, though, Montana ain't what she was. Shoe clerks that can't shoot stand as much show as any other *hombre*.

"The trouble is with us, Blister," I says one day, "that we're in each other's way. If we get ahead of this dude we gotta give each other a better break. Both of us can't stick around all the time. We must take turns."

"That ain't the trouble at all," disagrees my partner. "It's that voice of his. Just because he can sing a little bit the girls are crazy about him. As for me, I don't think he can sing for wormy apples. If we could choke him we'd be settin' pretty."

"Well, we can't—worse luck!" I remarks. "But we can keep his dates few and far between. Now, one of us gotta grab her for that dance next Saturday night at the Palace. We'll draw lots."

I had to do a lotta arguin' with Blister, but finally he give in. We cut for low card, and my partner won. He was to ask her to accompany him to the regular fortnightly hop.

Rose accepted his bid, and Blister felt pretty good. Of course I intended to be at the dance myself and sneak in a few dances if I could, and between the pair of us it looked as if we oughta monopolize Miss Rose mosta the time.

Well, in a way we did. The sweet sing-in' shoe clerk was amidst those present, however, and noways bashful. And durin' the course of the frolic he got up on the stage and warbled a solo, gainin' himself much applause. The Palace, you must know, is Panther Peak's movie house, and when they have a hop they just shove the seats outa the way after the last show and go to it.

Benny Harrow, the manager of the Palace, rolled his own with Blister and me durin' a step Oswald had managed to steal with Rose.

"Applegrass ain't got a bad voice," says Benny. "I'm kinda thinkin' of—"

"He's gotta good voice to cry for help or somethin'," snaps out my partner. "Every time I hear that *hombre* I wish I had been born deaf."

"Handlin' shoes is sure his line," I chimes in. "His brains are all in the feet."

"Come, come, boys!" Benny chuckles. "I ain't sayin' so, but you might be a little prejudiced against him. Fact is, I'm gonna use Oswald at next Friday night's show. Gonna have him sing."

"I'll miss that show," promises Blister.

"Both of you want to be on hand that night," squawks Benny, who is a great little booster for his business. "I'm givin' somethin' new 'in Panther Peak. Every week, startin' next Friday, I plan to hold an amateur night here at the show. Local talent will perform for prizes. It 'll be a barrel of fun."

"And Oswald is gonna sing, hey?" Blister perks up.

"Yep; he's tickled at the chance. But no rough stuff goes. The first buckaroo that starts anythin' at my amateur night performances is due to get the hook. The boys can talk if they want; no throwin' stuff, however."

"That shoe clerk must figure himself a coupla McCormacks," I says, hostile and bitter. "A lotta people are gettin' tired of his carolin' hereabouts. He's lucky to be still alive."

"Well, this dance is over, and I'm set for the next one," declares Blister. "Believe me—"

What we was supposed to believe we

never learned, for right then come bustin' into the Palace young Perry Paulson, the town marshal's boy, white as sheets.

"Jake Blake's broke out of jail and shot dad!" is the thrillin' information he hurls at us all.

And thrillin' it was; the old burg ain't seen so much excitement in a coon's age. Jake Blake was Panther Peak's hardest citizen. When he got corned up he was a ravagin', curly wolf—or thought he was, which is pretty near as bad. A coupla weeks before he had been tossed into the hoosegow for sprinklin' bullets too promiscuous up and down the main stem. This last stunt was his worst, however. He had got old man Paulson for keeps, and now enjoyed the status of an escaped murderer.

Naturally a posse was got up at the dance hall, and set right out to look for Jake. Blister and I was included in the gang, but Oswald Applegrass failed to come along. He had to see that Rose McIntyre got home safe, I suppose. That was like Oswald.

We failed to locate Jake that night. He knew the country around Panther Peak like a dressmaker does her customers, and there's a thousand holes in the hills in which a fellow can hide.

Next day the county sheriff took over the hunt, and a reward of five hundred smacks was posted for Mr. Blake, alive or dead. But he failed to show up either way.

After the first two or three days the excitement died down some, and the town began to think about Benny Harrow's amateur night show and other common things. Blister went out somewhere alone the evening before the big performance, and come back kinda late.

"Where you been—callin' on Rose?" I asks him.

"Nope. Just been investin' a coupla dollars in a good cause," he replies.

"How come?"

"Mebbe you'll see to-morrow night. I reckon Rose ain't so loco about Oswald Applegrass since he kept outa the posse the other night. She's beginnin' to see he ain't got much nerve, and she's gonna learn more

about his nerve before long. You takin' her to that show to-morrow night?"

I was, and I chirped as much.

"Well, I'll be somewheres in the near and immediate vicinity," Blister tells me. "Keep your eyes peeled and you'll see lots of interestin' things."

The mornin' of the show Blake horned into the limelight again. He busted into a shack on the edge of town, and was almost done for by a sour old bach who lived in the hovel. The murderer did get away, though the sheriff and his posse squawked it wouldn't be for long; they'd been sayin' that all week.

Rose McIntyre looked sweeter than lemon meringue pie when I took her to the performance at the Palace in the evenin', and was more pleasant toward me than she'd been for moons. Blister was waitin' at the theater for us to show up, and he squeezed into a seat on the other side of Rose. Us boys certainly kept a glim on each other.

Benny Harrow had a packed house for once. Even his seldom used balcony was crammed. Up on this shelf were stowed all the tough kids in town, includin' Bud Tooker's gang. This Bud was a hard little egg, and had a band of noble roughnecks behind him. From all the noise they were makin', the night promised to be unusually entertainin'. Some galoot was up there with them, supposed to keep order, but he was no more use than one of them trick divinin' rods that's alleged to indicate oil.

There was a feature picture first—as woolly a Western throbber as ever was staged in the wilderness around Los Angeles—and it had a hard *hombre* in it who was all to the Jake Blake. Naturally this set Rose and her two thorns to speculatin' on our own bad man, and some casual mention was made of Oswald, the warblin' foot-fitter. It seemed Rose was kinda harshed up on Mr. Applegrass for once. Durin' a lull in tenor solos he had used his mouth to make a few cracks about his personal bravery, and events of the past few days had given him some rare opportunities which he apparently had failed to take advantage of. Rose wasn't exactly off him; she was sorta disappointed.

Of course it all tickled Blister and me. We slipped the shoe clerk a sly knock every now and then through the course of the film.

Followin' the picture the stage was set for the amateurs, and Panther Peak prepared for the big palp of the night. Benny Harrow oiled the skids with a short speech, and then the catcalls started. Two girls pulled off a terrible song and dance, and a fat lady with a squeaky voice next tried to sing, and broke down right in the middle of it. She fled from the stage amid much clamor.

"This is awful, so far," says Rose, disgusted.

"Not so awful as it will be," remarks Blister, probably thinking of Oswald Applegrass.

One of our town loafers, Al Thrush, was third on the program. He tried to tell all about the time a certain Dan McGrew was drilled, but the bunch in the balcony, led by Bud Tooker's gang, howled him down. The howls increased when Benny Harrow brought out a hook and hauled Mr. Thrush off in disgrace.

"Wonder if Benny is gonna keep that handy for Oswald?" gargles Blister.

"Oh, now, Oswald can sing," defends Rose. "At least he'll be worth listenin' to."

Blister put on a weak smile, and I figured I knew just what was runnin' through his head. How both of us loved to listen to that shoe clerk!

Benny Harrow came out, attemptin' to appear cheery and gay.

"In our next number," he yodels, "we take great pleasure in presentin' to you Panther Peak's favorite tenor, Mr. Oswald Applegrass, in a program of his own selection."

A few yells and some applause. A lotta the ladies clapped their hands. Oswald was now before us.

He sure handed Panther Peak a wallop. Somewhere he had dug up a dress suit—not in the burg, I'll bet—and with his nicely boiled shirt and a rose in his buttonhole he made a sweet little picture for the folks. I think he even had some of the paint on his face regular actors use.

"I will first offer you," says the shoe clerk, kinda nervous, "that very popular song, 'All By Myself.'"

"Well, you oughta be!" comes from the balcony in Bud Tooker's voice.

Amid the laughs this crack caused Rose snaps:

"Now, I think that is mean! Give him a chance, anyway."

Blister and I kept still.

Oswald finally got under way with the song, and he sure was at his worst. Half-way through the chorus the cries from the balcony nearly swamped him:

"Get the hook! Get the hook!"

"Applegress! Applesauce!"

"Sing 'Dardanella'!"

"Find a plumber! Somethin' wrong with your pipes!"

"Razzberry! Haywire! Razzberry!"

"Go on out, all by yourself!"

"Where's the hook, Benny?"

Blister had a grin all over his face, but I noticed Rose was frownin' a lot. Oswald kept bleatin' away until he reached lines that go like this:

I'd like to rest my weary head on somebody's shoulder;

I hate—

Right *pronto* and sudden he stopped. He couldn't help it. From the shelf above had whizzed a beautifully aimed though far from infantile product of the hen. Squarely on the skull it caught the shoe clerk—and acted like all other eggs under similar circumstances.

"There's one for your weary head!" barks Bud Tooker's voice.

He had started somethin'. Eggs and vegetables rained toward Oswald. Young and old cacklefruit crashed about him. A ripe tomato wound up its career on his shirt bosom, and the dress suit resembled a trench durin' heavy shellfire. Shellfire is right.

Benny Harrow dashed forth, squawkin', but a wicked whack under the chin drove him to cover.

If he had any sense Oswald would have ducked at the first egg. But he was so mad he just stood there on the stage and raved at the crowd.

Blister was rockin' with laughter, and I suspected he had known all along what was comin'. I'll admit I was gettin' a kick outa this rough-house, too, but the look on Rose's face kept me from bustin' out in gales of merriment. I never had seen her so peeved.

The show was in a terrible uproar. Every one seemed to be yellin' one way or the other, and you could hardly hear yourself think.

Stuff continued to sail at the wrecked tenor.

"The mean devils!" finally oozes outa Rose. Right through her teeth it come.

"Pack of cowards!" squawks Oswald, and he began to pick up junk and heave it back.

We all ducked. He was plumb loco with rage, and throwin' in every direction.

A coupla *hombres* jumped up from their seats, and then we heard yells and curses from the back of the house, and I saw a big buckaroo plunge down the center aisle and leap onto the stage.

The shoe clerk had seen him approachin', too, and he didn't linger any longer. He fled back of the scenery, with the man right at his heels. Both of them vanished.

"He may be killed! Oh, these brutes!" Rose cries, risin' in her seat. "You can laugh, Mr. Burns, all you like. I suppose you and Mr. Peabody had a hand in this, and I'll get even with you for it!"

With that she forced her way out into the aisle and was one of the first to reach the stage. Quickly she was outa sight. I felt uneasy.

"Put Bud Tucker up to this, didn't you?" I growls. "And I get blamed for it, too. Now you've cooked us, all right!"

"Aw—" begins Blister, not gigglin' at present.

"Come on—let's see what's happened!" I says. "We have to look after Rose, anyway, you know."

As we milled through the excited mob I was staggered to see members of the sheriff's posse pushin' people to right and left, and headin' for the stage. Snatches of talk drifted to Blister and me.

"They had Jake Blake, and he broke away. . . . Caught him near the Dozen

Diggers' well. . . . Knocked the sheriff cold in front of the theater and broke loose. . . . Trying to get into the crowd and escape in the confusion. . . . That was him went down the aisle and jumped on the stage. . . . Yes, he's probably killed Applegrass."

It was easy to grasp the situation. Jake Blake, after capture, had attempted a wild dash for freedom. He hadn't jumped on the stage to attack Oswald. In fact, he probably didn't know who the shoe clerk was. The noise in the house had helped his reckless deed.

Most of us were soon out in the alley behind the movie house—it borders on Russett's lumber yard, which would have been a good place for Jake Blake to get—and we sure were astounded to find Rose McIntyre with her arms around Oswald Applegrass, eggs, tomatoes and all. And at their feet lay the unconscious form of Panther Peak's prize bad man, a nasty gash in his dome.

In less time than it takes a gusher to bust through the crust Oswald had shifted from the amateur night angora to the town hero. No wonder Blister Burns and I gasped and gulped.

This ain't exactly the way Oswald explains it nowadays, but from what I can piece together this is the true story: The shoe clerk dashed off the stage and outa the rear door into the alley, figurin' Jake a peeved patron of the Palace he had crowned with a return missile. More than likely he was scared stiff, too.

Outside in the alley he seemed to have stumbled over a chunk of two-by-four, and spilled to his knees. Desperately and hardly knowin' what he was doin', Oswald scrambled to his feet and blindly swiped the short piece of timber at the guy he thought was after him.

And thereupon Jake Blake, trying only to get by Oswald and away from the posse hot after him, had been knocked cold by a poor galoot who didn't even know who he was. At least, it wasn't until frightened Rose McIntyre had reached Oswald and they both took a good look at the senseless victim did it dawn upon 'em that instead of bein' in line for a charge of near manslaughter the shoe clerk was an unconscious

hero and a swell bet for some of that five-hundred-bucks reward.

Don't that take the bacon and biscuit for dumb, dizzy luck?

None of the other amateur acts was staged that night, and Rose went home with Oswald Appleglass. I didn't butt in. I started to, but got stopped mighty *pronto*.

Bud Tooker and his gang made themselves scarce, for Benny Harrow and some other people were squawkin' real loud about the riot in the show, and now that Jake Blake was a prisoner again the law could interest itself in such doin's.

Blister Burns and I pulled up stakes and beat it from Panther Peak a coupla weeks later. The well was a flivver, anyhow.

Oh, yes, Oswald is still sellin' shoes, and probably givin' nobody a chance to forget he laid low the desperate murderer and jailbreaker, Jake Blake, just as in the song he sang—all by himself. The yarn improves with passin' time.

And Rose McIntyre is branded with a diamond Oswald's split of the reward paid for, I believe, and by now likely is bearin' the proud name of Appleglass. But if Blister hadn't paid good dough to Bud Tooker to bombard Oswald, and Blake had stayed where he belonged, it's kale to kerosene that she—

Still, what's the use?

No, I reckon there ain't no such thing as luck!



The Lady in Blue

Part IV

by Augusta Groner and Grace Colbron

Authors of "The Man with the Black Cord," "Joe Muller, Detective," etc.

CHAPTER XI (continued).

THE TORN LETTERS.

OSSIP poked into the dark interior of the firebox and brought out the usual assortment of odds and ends that are apt to be thrown into a stove during the summer months. There was a broken ivory paper knife, a small torn lampshade, bonbon papers, scraps of newspapers and a number of torn letters. These last Ossip laid carefully to one side until he had them all together. Then he handed

them to Muller, who smoothed them out. There were in all three sheets of writing paper, of three different colors, and they had been just torn through once. One seemed part of another letter, a second sheet. It began near the top without any heading:

It's beastly dull in this old hole. I wish you'd—

Then the pen sputtered so badly that the writer had torn the sheet and thrown it away. The writing was Elise Lehman's.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 8.

The next letter, on rose-tinted paper, began solemnly with a quotation:

"And therein lies the magic power of love,
That it ennobles with its lightest breath."

Grillparzer.—SAPPHO 1.5.

"Nothing like being definite," murmured Muller. The letter read:

MY OWN DEARLY BELOVED EDMUND:

When will those happy days come again—the days when you can be with me—

A spot as if from a finger stained with moist chocolate put an end to this effusion.

The third letter, on very heavy light green paper, began:

HONEY BUNCH:

Do be nice again. I know you won't do anything to spoil my good luck—

A big ink-spot was the reason for tearing up this sheet.

Muller threw the first two letters back on the heap of litter and looked at the third again. It was the only one of any importance. For it proved that Elise Lehman was still corresponding with a former lover even after her official engagement to Baron Wallroth. And it proved also that this lover was angry and had made some threat that disturbed the girl.

"That fits the theory of the discarded lover's anger," thought Muller. "But then there is Tony—this young woman is very troublesome—very!" The detective leaned back in his chair while a sentence in "Goldie Boy's" letter and one on the torn scraps from the garden pieced themselves together in his mind to a clearer line of thought. "The firm might send me off in the opposite direction," wrote the lover. And the friend spoke of some one who was "In Venice on—" If it was "on business," it might be Goldie Boy. And if Goldie Boy was in Venice he would be easier to locate there, being a foreigner, than he would be in his own country.

But if Goldie Boy was in Venice, who was the excited young man who tried to force his way in last evening? Of course he might have come home from Venice on the news of Elise Lehman's death.

"We'll investigate that young man, and then, if need be, we can go to Venice."

When he came to this spot in his thoughts Muller rose.

"We can go now. I may have to leave Salzburg to-night."

Ossip did not speak, but his eyes asked a question. Muller locked the door and handed the key to the boy before he spoke again. "You are to stay here in this house. I still hope that one or the other of those we seek, the man or the woman, may come back here. If I do find the man elsewhere, you may find the woman or some trace of her. It would help me greatly."

Ossip reddened with pride and delight, but grew pale again as Muller continued: "It is a true saying that he who has shed blood is drawn back, often against his will, to the scene of his crime. You know how true—from your own experience."

"Oh, Mr. Muller—why did you remind me—"

"To spur you on to greater effort," replied Muller, resting his hand on the boy's shoulder. "We do not conquer our sins by trying to forget them, but by facing them bravely and rising superior to the memory. I shall need you more and more, Ossip, and I want you to become a worthwhile man and to dedicate yourself to the service of justice. If you do this, you will make me glad of my moment of weakness that day a year ago when I helped outwit the law of your country. But don't ever let me feel sorry that I took you from Nicola Pludoff's barn."

Ossip's big eyes, clear to the depths now, looked straight at his master. "You shall never repent it, Mr. Muller," he replied solemnly. "I will serve justice and make up, a thousandfold, for my sin. All I ask is hard work. Men with—such memories deserve nothing else and should be thankful for that. I am thankful."

"Come, come now, keep a cool head," soothed Muller. "We've tackled a far more difficult job here than I thought at first. We must keep calm and have all our wits about us. And let me tell you—our work is full of fascination and can bring the sweetness of triumph—it can make us forget—much—" The last words were spoken low and Muller's eyes looked off in-

to distance. The young Russian remembered snatches of stories heard concerning Muller's life—of how early personal misfortune had given the world a great detective when this man was ostracised from the everyday walks of life. The impressionable boy silently vowed that he too would let the errors of his youth lead him into the paths of service.

They walked downstairs without another word, and sat down at Mrs. Deisler's invitingly cheery breakfast table.

"You won't be alone in the house now, Mrs. Deisler," began Muller, sipping his tea. "I'm going to leave my young friend Ossip Jewleff here to keep you company. He can have Tony's room."

Mrs. Deisler tried to look pleased. But she did not like the young man's appearance. He was too "foreign" for her taste. Also she preferred people who came and went by the door rather than by the windows and walls. But she promised to make things comfortable for him.

When Muller returned to the hotel he learned that the blond young man, George Brantschli, had gone out. He still retained his room, however. The clerk at the desk who knew Muller's position, told the detective that he thought the man was a traveling salesman for a jewelry house, or something similar. Muller gave him some instructions, and then took the letters that were waiting for him. Among them was a fat letter from Walter Thorn.

A stout, red-faced individual, who had been standing in the hall, came up at the clerk's nod and introduced himself as a cabman who had been sent to see Mr. Muller from Police Headquarters. It was the driver who had taken the couple to the Gray House on the evening of May 29th.

Muller took the man to his room and had him repeat the story he had narrated, under oath, at headquarters.

"Yes, sir, it was me. I was drivin' in slow, I'd been out across the river, and just as I was passing the Artillery Barracks I see a young woman comin' toward me and wavin' her hand at me. I stop, and up she comes with another lady all dressed up swell in a light dress and dark cloak."

"Did you see this lady's face?"

"No. She had a powerful big hat on, and a heavy veil and she was hangin' onto the veil as if it was some trouble to keep her hat on, which I dassay it was, 'cos there was some wind that night."

"What time was it when they took your cab?"

"It must ha' been about quarter past ten, I'm thinking, 'cos I heard a church clock strike just before that. The tall lady didn't say a word till they got into the cab. Then they both talked a lot. And I remember thinkin' what a deep voice the tall lady had, 'cos I could hear it every now and then, and it was different from the other one—from the young women that hailed me."

"Did you notice anything more about the two?"

"No, sir. We drove to the Gray House, and the tall lady went right in. The other, she paid my fare and talked to an old woman who came out and opened the gate for them."

"Didn't it occur to you," asked Muller, "that there might have been some connection between this drive and the suicide of the young lady in the Gray House, that very same night?"

"No, sir." The man shook his heavy head. "I thought they was just goin' home like so many people that time o' night. If I'd thought anything about it, I'd a gone to the police before now and not had them come huntin' me like I'd been doin' something wrong."

"Pie-face," thought Muller, remembering the letter of the garden. This time the word seemed to fit.

He dismissed the cabman and opened Walter Thorn's long letter.

The painter went over in detail all he had seen in the Gray House, and the impressions he had received there. The letter went on:

I'm sorry I can't be of any more assistance. I have no suggestion to make that can be of any value at all.

You ask for information as to any mutual acquaintances my cousin and his fiancée might have had. That question is easily answered. My cousin, always of frail health, has lived very quietly and spent much time in the south. His mother, Baroness Wallroth, is

one of the most exclusive of Vienna's wealthy women, and particularly since the death of her husband she has devoted herself so entirely to her son that she might almost be said to have dropped out of society altogether. The few friends who come to her formal dinners are people for whom such a girl as Elise Lehman simply does not exist, the women that is. And the men are most of them old enough to be counted out in this matter.

When they are at home my aunt and her son give a musical evening now and then to a small and select gathering. Hubert Lohr, Elise's brother, is a frequent performer at these affairs. He is a gifted composer and was a protégé of the late Baron Wallroth, who gave him his education. This, with one exception, is the only connection between Elise Lehman and my cousin's home circle.

The exception is a young man by the name of Richard Volkner, son of a business friend of my uncle. The two families were very intimate at one time, but there has been a coolness between them of late, due to a falling out between the two young men. To my great astonishment I learned only yesterday that my cousin Edmund had had a duel with Richard Volkner some time during the past winter, and that the cause of it was a remark Volkner had made concerning Elise Lehman. It seems he had been a lover of the dead girl at one time. Edmund must have more temperament than I have given him credit for or Volkner must have angered him greatly—anyway, the upshot was a pistol duel. My cousin was not hurt, but Volkner was badly wounded and is still in the south, somewhere in Italy, I think, recuperating. Neither my aunt nor Volkner's parents know anything of this duel. Volkner is supposed to be recuperating from an attack of influenza.

I am telling you this in detail, for I do not want you to go off on a false trail. You may hear, somewhere, something of Richard Volkner's former affair with the Lehman girl, and also you may hear about the duel. But my cousin does not think that Richard Volkner can possibly have anything to do with the murder. He has been in Italy since early in the year, and his connection with Elise is a matter of a year or so back, and was over long before Edmund met the girl. My cousin is sure of this.

He is still terribly upset over the sad affair and I have persuaded him to go to Berlin with me for a time. We will remain there, and I am at your disposal whenever you need me.

WALTER THORN.

"H-m! Wallroth had a duel with this young blood, eh?" thought Muller. "The Baron is not quite such a 'pie-face' as people seem to think. Elise Lehman was

the cause of the duel, and this young man is somewhere in Italy? Now, is it he who is 'In Venice on'—a vacation? And in spite of Professor Thorn's protestation, I believe he thinks or did think Richard Volkner guilty. He feels relieved now that he hears the young man is in Italy. But Italy is not so very far away, when money is no object. The professor would hate to think he had set me on to catch a man of his own class—they all prefer some nameless tramp—natural, I suppose. Still I think I'll take a run down to Venice and call on this young Volkner. He can't be 'Goldie Boy,' for he is a man of wealth and breeding. But that would make him more the sort that a girl like Tony would do so much for. I'll take a look at him."

Muller studied the railway guide and noted down the time of the night express for the south. Then he called a cab and drove to the Artillery Barracks, telling the driver to wait. He disappeared behind the big building in the direction of the river bank.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LEFT-HANDED MAN.

OSSIP resumed his hunt for torn bits of paper in the garden, but without much success. One tiny scrap gleamed out amid the thick ivy leaves that clothed the gray wall. Ossip reached up after it, and the big limbs of a great elm tempted him to pursue his investigations further. He climbed to the level of the wall top, and sat there, looking up and down the river path, eagerly scanning the fringe of bushes. Suddenly he smiled.

A young man was strolling along the path, reading as he walked. It was the student, Franz Moser.

"Good morning," remarked Ossip, as the lad came past his post of observation.

Moser started and looked up surprised, but could not locate the voice.

"Look up to the stars," said Ossip. "A poet should always look upward."

Moser saw him and laughed merrily. "Comfortable up there?" he asked.

"It is," said Ossip. "But if you wait a

minute, I'll join you. I'm going in your direction."

The young Russian looked down longingly at the easy jump. But remembering the distrust with which the two guardians of the house had received his first informal entrance, he resolved to do the proper thing this time. He slipped down the tree trunk, and came out of the garden gate toward the waiting Moser. A sheet of paper lay before him and Ossip snatched it up eagerly. But after a hasty glance at it, he handed it to Moser. "Did you lose this?"

"Oh yes, thank you so much," exclaimed the student with a vivid blush. "I didn't want to lose that."

"It looks like a poem—did you write it?"

Moser nodded to the young stranger, with the freemasonry of youth. "Yes," he admitted, his cheeks a deeper red. "But I wouldn't like any one to see it—I'm such an amateur yet. And—people laugh at us—older people."

Ossip smiled in acquiescence.

Moser looked at him as if greatly interested. Suddenly he asked: "You are a Russian, aren't you?"

"Do I look it?"

"Why, yes—you look as if you might be—"

"Might be what?"

"One of the people that Tolstoy, or Gorki write about—I imagined they—might look that way."

Ossip's smile faded, his face grew dark again, his eyes tragic. "Yes, I am—one of those people—"

"Do all Russians look as if—they had experienced so much—that is tragic?" asked Moser timidly, after a pause.

"Yes—for life brings tragic experiences to most of my people—our great writers have told the world something of what we suffer—"

Ossip paused. He suddenly remembered that he wanted to talk to Moser about other matters rather than his own life and destiny.

But the blond lad was still absorbed in the interesting subject. "Are you a college man?" he asked.

"I—was." Ossip set his lips tight, then continued more lightly: "But you are?"

Moser felt that his new acquaintance did not care to talk about himself. So he began to tell of his own studies and plans for the future.

"There's one interest you haven't mentioned," said Ossip after a while. "The gray house." The two were stretched out on the soft grass by the river. Moser blushed again and pulled up a bit of grass.

"Why, yes. I've always been interested in this old house."

"Particularly since it had two charming inmates?"

"Two? Oh, yes, there were two. But the other was merely her shadow. Did you ever see the dead lady?"

"No."

"She was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. I used to catch a glimpse of her occasionally when I came here to the river bank to study."

"And write poems?" put in Ossip with a smile. "Has your Swan Song anything to do with Miss Lehman?"

Moser looked up startled. "What do you—how did you know about my poem?" he asked, as he rose to his feet. Ossip rose too, and they started on toward the town.

"We saw you here before—my employer and I. The day the paper fell out of your hand—your Swan Song."

"Yes, I remember now. It was written to her—I saw her, heard her singing, the very evening, before she killed herself. It was her Swan Song."

"She was in good spirits then?"

"Yes—and no. When I first saw her, she was singing merrily. But later, when she came back, with the gentleman, she looked annoyed, almost angry—"

Ossip's hand fell on the student's arm with such a sudden sharp pressure that Moser stopped, startled. "When did she come back? She, and the man?" asked the Russian eagerly.

"Why should it interest you?" queried Moser.

"Answer, please, I beg of you."

"Why, surely, if you want to know. It was a little past six, I think."

"And it was that Saturday, you're sure?"

"It was that very Saturday. They found her—dead—next morning."

"Come with me, please." Ossip quickened his pace, his hand still on Moser's arm.

"What's the hurry and where are you taking me?" asked the latter.

Ossip realized he would have to give some explanation of his excitement. He slowed to a more normal pace. "Don't think me quite crazy," he replied. "But this is a serious matter—it concerns the—the—truth about a crime—a murder."

"Murder? Then—she did not—kill—herself?"

"No, she did not. And what you have just said may be of the very greatest value in tracking down the murderer. That is why I ask you to come with me."

"Who are you?" Moser looked at his companion with rising distrust.

Ossip smiled. "I? Oh, I am only—*his* shadow—the shadow of a great man, my master."

"Who—is he?"

Ossip's face softened. "He is the best man in all the world—he saved me—he gave me my chance. As far as the rest of the world goes he is a celebrated man, in his way. You've probably never heard of him, but there are many who know him and respect him, and many others who know him and fear him. I am just an humble servant of the famous detective, Joseph Muller."

"Oh, a detective? How interesting!"

"And here he comes—" Ossip quickened his pace again to meet the slight gray-haired man, whose gentle, kindly face did not at all live up to Moser's idea of a famous detective. But his second look disclosed the fact that the keen gray eyes now fixed on him had something in them which belied the everyday appearance of this elderly gentleman. To the sensitive lad they seemed to read down into his very soul. But Muller held out his hand with a disarmingly friendly smile.

"Isn't this Mr. Moser? I thought so. And as my young assistant here seems to have you in custody, I am taking for granted that you have something to tell us, something of importance concerning the matter that brings us to Salzburg. How about it, Ossip?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Muller," exclaimed the

Russian eagerly. "Mr. Moser tells me that he saw Miss Lehman going back into the house about six that Saturday evening—with a man."

Muller's eyes flashed, then grew very serious. "That is indeed important. But we don't want to hold you up here, on the hot and dusty street. Is there any good restaurant near where we can have our dinner and talk undisturbed?"

"The place across the way is good," replied Moser, "and has a big garden where we can find a secluded table."

"What do you want to know?" asked Moser a few minutes later, as they sat around a table some distance from the few other guests in the shaded garden. "What interests you most?"

"Everything—tell me everything. The least trifle that could possibly concern this case is of value to me."

Moser told of his interest in the romantic old house with its reputation for mystery, and did not conceal the fact that this interest had been greatly quickened by a glimpse of its beautiful occupant. He told Muller that on that Saturday evening, or rather late afternoon, he had passed by the house on the river side and had seen Miss Lehman at the window. She was standing by the open window, looking out and singing merrily. When her eyes fell on the young student he had doffed his hat with a respectful bow which seemed to amuse her very much.

"She seemed to think it very silly of me," he continued haltingly. "Which it probably was—and presuming on my part, too. But she was so beautiful—and laughed so prettily—that I didn't mind—giving her cause for laughter."

"You have no reason to be ashamed—" said Muller as the lad paused in his story. "Except that—her sort of woman seldom understands real respect from a man. What did you do then?"

"I was a bit angry—and hurt—I walked on further down the path and sat down under an elderbush which sheltered me from the wind. I read for some little time, then I heard voices coming from the direction of the meadow. I looked up, and to my great surprise I saw Miss Lehman—I didn't

know her name then, but it was the Lady in Blue—coming along between the trees. There was a gentleman with her and they were talking rather excitedly."

"In what way? As if they had met unexpectedly and were glad to see each other?"

"No. It looked to me as if they were quarreling. But I can't say for certain, for I couldn't understand the words."

"Were they so far away?"

"No, but the wind blew the sound of their voices away from me."

"And they went into the garden from the river side?"

"I think it very likely. If I hadn't known just why you were questioning me I should have said they did go in that way. But I want to tell you only such facts as I am certain of. I couldn't see the path that far from my bush. They may have gone around to the main gate."

"No; they went in the side gate," said Muller. "Did you see anything of the other woman, the maid, Tony?" Moser shook his head. "How long did you sit under your bush?"

"About half an hour, I think, or it may have been a bit longer. Then I felt cold. I walked along the river for some distance, then back across the meadow to the brook, and then—"

Moser halted. Muller laid his hand on the young man's arm while he and Ossip studied the student's face eagerly. Moser seemed struggling to recall some memory.

"And then?" asked Muller softly.

"I don't think this has anything to do with the case," continued Moser in some excitement. "And I'm not sure whether I can tell you anything—very definitely. I didn't pay much attention. But I remember seeing a man standing by the brook, near the little bridge. It seemed to me that it was the same man whom I had seen with Miss Lehman—but I couldn't be at all sure. I'm a little near-sighted—and I—didn't look at the man—very closely—the first time I saw him. I was—" Moser stopped again and then went on bravely in spite of his blushes. "I was looking at the lady."

"Quite natural," said Muller with an en-

couraging smile. "Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have done the same."

Moser nodded gratefully and went on. "But I do know that the man who went into the house with Miss Lehman had nothing in his hand except a cane, or maybe it was a tightly rolled umbrella. I couldn't see surely. But the man by the brook was carrying his cane, and besides that a valise, which he carried in his right hand."

"And his cane?" cut in Muller quickly.

"He carried that in his left hand."

"A valise?" exclaimed Ossip.

"What sort of a valise was it?" asked Muller calmly. "Did you notice its appearance?"

"Oh, yes," replied Moser with quick assurance. "It was a light-colored bag with black straps."

"And the man himself—would you recognize him again? What did he look like?"

"I couldn't see his face. He seemed to have heard me coming, and walked on quickly."

"But his figure—can you describe it? His height and size?"

"About normal."

"And his clothes?"

"He wore knickerbockers and heavy stockings—with a short coat. I think his suit was dark gray. It was growing dusk and I couldn't be sure about the color."

"But you're sure about the valise?"

"Yes, I noticed that particularly because I have one just like it. And then I was more interested in what the man was doing than in his appearance."

"What was he doing?"

"He crossed the little foot bridge, stopped halfway over and threw something in the water—something white, I thought at first it was a piece of paper."

A slow flush rose to Muller's cheek.

"No, it was not paper."

"I saw that later," went on Moser. "It must have been a piece of goods of some kind, something soft. The man put down his cane, leaned it against the railing of the bridge and threw the white object into the creek. It spread out when it struck the water. The creek was full and flowing swiftly. It carried off the white thing, and I watched its gyrations for some little

time. When I looked up again the man had gone on and I soon lost sight of him. I don't know why I watched that white object—one does sometimes."

"Too bad you didn't watch the man," said Ossip low. "He had just killed Elise Lehman."

Moser stared at the young Russian in horror. "Are you sure of that?" he gasped, but Ossip motioned him to be quiet, for Muller was speaking. He seemed to be thinking aloud rather than addressing them.

"It was not a piece of goods," he murmured. "It was a right-hand glove. He must have taken it from the corpse, and torn the leather even more than on the other glove. It was safest to get it out of the way altogether. That's why he threw it into the creek—" Muller passed his hand over his eyes, then turned to Moser. "Did you notice the color of his hair by any chance?"

Moser shook his head. "I have an idea it was brown."

"And his age? What impression did you get?"

"He was not very young, not a lad. But he wasn't old, his walk was quick and springy."

"Is there anything more you can tell us about him?"

"No."

"Nor about the dead woman?"

"I saw her about a dozen times in all, either in the garden or at the window. I thought her extraordinarily beautiful. I had never seen any one like that before. And her clothes were so rich—a bit fantastic, to my thinking—she always wore light blue. You see, I come from up in the mountains, from a little village. We don't see such women there. I confess I thought of her often."

"Do you know, or did you notice, her maid who was with her so often?"

"Only that she, too, was very pretty. Only not so striking."

"And looked ill, did she not?"

"Why no, she looked strong and vigorous. But she was so grave and quiet, not as bright and gay as the other."

"Did you ever see either of the women outside the house?"

"I never saw Miss Lehman anywhere outside of the house or garden. But I saw the maid once, talking to the old woman who has the apple stand near the Public Bath. She was sitting down and had the old woman's grandchild on her lap. She was holding up a bunch of cherries, and the little girl was trying to catch them. The child is blind, they say, but it was laughing and reaching up with its little hands. It was a pretty sight. A man going past stopped just as I did to look at it. 'Madonna of the Cherries,' he said."

"Was that your thought, too?"

"No, not exactly, although the girl was very pretty. But I imagine a Madonna gentler, softer—this girl—I don't think she was a girl, somehow—she was more a Valkyrie type, strong, firm, self-contained, if you know what I mean."

Muller nodded. A neighboring church clock struck loudly and Moser rose.

"I'm afraid I will have to leave you. I have a pupil—but if there is anything else—"

"Oh, no—don't let me disturb you in your day's work. But I would like to have you keep in touch with my young friend here. He's living in the Gray House just now."

Muller and Ossip sat silent for some little time after Moser had gone.

"Well?" asked the detective finally.

Ossip threw the bread ball he had been forming at a near-by sparrow and began: "Normal figure, quick and springy gait—that's not much to go on, is it? But the dark gray sport suit brings us nearer. We must find out who of Miss Lehman's intimate friends owns such a suit. He must have been an intimate friend, or she would not have taken him into her house, alone, by the side gate."

"Exactly. And what else?"

"He must be left-handed."

"Good boy. How did you get that?"

"He carried his cane in his left hand and set it against the railing when he took the glove from his pocket—left pocket probably, and threw it into the creek. That creek over there is narrow and the reeds on the banks come out far into the stream. If a man wanted to be sure of letting some

object float away on the current he'd have to throw it well out into the center of the stream. He couldn't just let it drop. And a right-handed man wouldn't deliberately throw with his left hand."

"Good, that's very good! You are learning rapidly, Ossip. You are a real help to me. Remember, then, we are looking for a man of normal figure, somewhere between twenty-five to forty years of age, who is left-handed, and has feet that are small and slender for a man. Also he is an intimate friend of the Lehman girl, and owns a dark-gray bicycle or hiking costume. His hair is probably brown; anyway, it is neither noticeably blond nor dark. Personally I'm inclined to think he is a man of refinement and cultivation—but I'm not banking on that—it's only because of Tony."

They had left the restaurant and were walking through the quiet streets.

"I'll search the creek banks," said Ossip.

"Good. I'll meet you in the Gray House at four this afternoon. I'm leaving to-night."

"There's the apple stand," remarked Ossip a few moments later. "The child is there, too; yes, it's blind."

"Tony petted the blind child," murmured Muller thoughtfully. Ossip turned back toward the river and the veteran detective went on to the fruit stand.

He bought some fruit, petted the child and led the old woman on to talk of the Gray House and what had happened there. He learned that Tony had often come to buy fruit, and had been particularly nice to the child whenever she found it there. Once, while she held the baby on her lap, she began to cry bitterly. This was the day after the funeral.

Muller was a bit disappointed and slightly irritated. He felt the crawling fingers of old age reaching out and dulling the brain that had been so keen. He had facts in plenty to go on now in this case, but he seemed further away from its solution than ever. What had happened was plain enough, but no clew of any importance or value led off in any definite direction.

Joseph Muller, the calm and self-possessed, felt decidedly annoyed—annoyed at himself, too.

The old woman didn't know her visitor's name—knew only that she was maid to the lady in the Gray House. "But I'm thinkin' she was a married woman," she volunteered.

"She stopped the letter carrier once, and he knew her and gave her letters for the Gray House. She cut one open in a hurry with my knife, and there was another inside which she was in a hurry to see, too. I saw one corner of the envelope—I know it said 'Mrs.," but I couldn't see the rest. She had it crumpled up in her hand."

At the post office they knew only that the handsome young lady—the Lady in Blue—had called several times for General Delivery letters under the name of "Gold Fairy." The other woman had never been seen there as far as any one knew.

"I wouldn't like to acknowledge it to anyone else—but I don't seem to be getting anywhere at all," thought Muller. "It all seemed so simple—but it's this Tony. I didn't know any one *could* disappear so completely in this country."

CHAPTER XIII.

"GOLDIE BOY."

MULLER returned to the Gray House at four o'clock and went up to Ossip's room, the one formerly occupied by the mysterious Tony. The first thing that drew his attention was a badly torn and very wet white kid glove, hanging in the window to dry.

"I found it caught on a root about ten yards down stream from the foot bridge," explained Ossip. "There's a piece missing, but I couldn't find it."

"Did you search this room thoroughly?" Muller gave the glove a careful examination as he spoke.

"Yes, sir, but there isn't a thing that could be of any use to us."

"I feared as much. This Tony had all her wits about her." Muller looked around the room. "I've never wasted much time in wishing that walls might talk, but I do now."

"Oh, Mr. Muller—they do talk for you."

"Hello—what's all that noise down there? What's the excitement?"

Muller threw the window wide open and leaned out.

Ossip was beside him. "A child's fallen into the river," he exclaimed, turning quickly and throwing off his coat as he ran from the room. Muller, from the window, watched his young assistant tear out of the gate, stop to loosen and kick off his shoes, and then plunge into the swiftly flowing stream, swimming with powerful strokes toward a blotch of pink that rose and fell with the movement of the water.

Muller walked downstairs calmly. Ossip was an excellent swimmer. If he could reach the child in time it was safe. Buchner and Mrs. Deisler had preceded him, and the gardener was among those who helped draw the young Russian and the unconscious child to the bank.

"She's all right now, I think," said Ossip when he saw Muller. The boy himself was bleeding from a bad knee wound that showed red and raw through the hole in his torn trouser-leg. They disentangled themselves from the group around the little form in the grass when they saw the child's eyes open again. Buchner and Mrs. Deisler joined them, the housekeeper loud in her praises of Ossip's quickness and courage. Both she and the gardener busied themselves around him, binding up his wound with skillful care.

Suddenly Mrs. Deisler looked up, and turned to Muller.

"Did you leave the windows open upstairs, sir? There's one slamming now."

"How can it slam? There's no wind—still a moment." Muller raised his hand and listened, stopping Mrs. Deisler's alarmed exclamation with a determined gesture.

"There's some one upstairs—we all went out and left everything open—Buchner, go outside and watch the windows of the corner room—no, you stay here, Ossip—guard the stairway—"

Muller was running upstairs softly, but quickly, almost before the last words were spoken. Buchner stood dazed, but Ossip shoved him to the door.

"Do as he tells you—quick—it may be important—give me that poker, Mrs. Deisler—"

"Oh, what is it?" whispered the frightened woman.

"Maybe the very man we're looking for—we can leave it to Mr. Muller to get him, if it is he—but we won't let him run past us here."

Upstairs Muller stood in the doorway of the corner room, watching the broad back of a sturdily built blond young man, who was quite absorbed in his ransacking of the desk drawers. There was such a look of healthy young strength about the figure before him that the veteran detective put one hand in his pocket, loosening the revolver he always carried from its fastenings in the coat lining.

"Good afternoon," he remarked casually.

The man wheeled and confronted him, backing up against the desk. As Muller had suspected, it was the young man he had seen in the hotel lobby. He was scowling now and looked decidedly threatening. "May I ask what you are doing here?" continued Muller calmly.

"What business is that of yours?" replied the man sullenly.

"I am in charge here, by order of the present lessee of this property, Baron Wallroth."

"Oh, you're his agent, eh?"

"Yes. And as such I ask what you are doing here, and by what right you were ransacking that desk?"

"I didn't steal anything. I'm looking for my own property."

"Indeed! Something you forgot—something you left here?" Muller moved a step nearer, his fingers tightening around the handle of his revolver.

But the man opposite him did not move. He looked up in a sort of surly surprise. "Forgot? How could I forget it, when I haven't found it yet?"

Muller took his hand from his pocket; the tension of his attitude relaxed a trifle, but his keen eyes still studied the flushed, scowling face confronting him.

"Then, may I ask how any property of yours came to be here in these rooms?"

"Because I— Well, aren't letters supposed to be the property of the person who writes them?"

"Yes. I think it is a point of law. It certainly is a point of ethics. You are looking for a package of letters written by you to Miss Lehman? Maybe I can help you there."

"Did you—master—send you here to snoop around and poke into a poor girl's past? Why can't he let her rest in her grave? He'd better not have too much investigating done, or he might find several reasons why she preferred death to marriage with him. Fool! Does he think that just because he has money and a title he can buy a girl like that and keep her heart for himself—"

He broke off, set his teeth, and turned aside to avoid the eyes that seemed to burn into his.

"Don't be so excited, young friend." Muller's tone was calm and kindly. "You are doing Baron Wallroth an injustice in several ways. Let's sit down and talk calmly."

"What about?"

"Matters that interest you. Are you Goldie Boy?"

The man flushed, but did not answer.

"If you are, you may have your letters—I think."

"You found them? Give them to me." He followed on Muller's heels as the detective went into the bedroom.

Muller unlocked the lacquered box and took out the package of letters. The young man started when he saw them and made a sudden snatch at them.

"One moment, please," said the detective. "I have some questions to ask you first."

"Suppose I don't answer? Suppose I take them from you by force? They are my property; no one has any right to them since—she—is dead. You'd better give them to me." His lips curved threateningly. "You wouldn't have a ghost of a chance against me."

"Oh, yes," replied Muller, whose right hand had again slipped into his pocket. "Because, unless you are transgressing the law of the land, you are not armed—and I am."

"Then you are transgressing the law?"

"Oh, no. I have an official right to

carry arms, as a member of the police force."

The young man fell back with a start.

"Police! Why should that man send police here? What does he mean by this?"

"Please sit down," said Muller firmly, sitting down himself and pushing forward a chair for the other. "There is more to this case than you—appear to think. If you will act like a sensible man and answer a few simple questions, I think—yes, I really do believe—that you will leave here with your letters in your possession again. That depends upon your answers to my questions. But I can assure you, for your own comfort, that no one but myself has seen these letters, and that Baron Wallroth does not know of their existence, and probably never will."

The young man stood motionless a moment, but could not resist a deep breath of relief. Then he threw himself down into his chair.

"Your name?" asked Muller, as the other did not speak.

"George Brantschli, traveling salesman for Haas Brothers in Vienna."

"You knew Elise Lehman—well?"

Brantschli nodded without looking up. "You read those letters."

"Exactly. That answers that question. How long had you known her?"

"About a year; but it was only the last six months that—that we'd been such friends."

"And you didn't like the idea of giving her up?"

"Don't see how that concerns you."

"It may concern the reason for my being here. Answer, please."

"Did you know her—Elise?"

"No." Muller could not resist a faint smile. "But I hear she was very handsome."

"She was a wonder—a stunner—and when she cared for a man—"

"I see. Did you want to marry her?"

Brantschli started up with an oath.

"I'm not going to stand for any such—"

"Oh, yes, you are. Come now, man to man, answer my question."

"You must know something of how things go in the world, if you belong to the

police force. You ought to know that a fellow like me can't afford to marry that kind of girl. Sooner or later she was bound to land some rich fool, and then she'd shake the rest of us."

"You're quite sensible. Then, I take it, you did not have any illusions about her? You did not care for her sufficiently to go to any length to stop this marriage?"

Brantschli looked frankly bewildered.

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you think Elise Lehman killed herself?"

Brantschli hesitated.

"Maybe she found she didn't want to marry him after all."

"Because she cared for some one else?" asked Muller. Brantschli nodded without looking up. "My dear young friend," continued the detective, "if you know anything about the world, and about what you call 'that sort of girl'—no, if you knew anything about this particular girl whom you think you love—do you think she cared for you enough to choose death rather than marriage with another? Be honest with yourself."

"I'm going to ask a question now which will probably annoy you. But a good deal depends—for you—on your answer. So be sensible and answer it. I will say in advance that Baron Wallroth will never know what your answer has been; no one but myself will know." Muller's tone was so grave that the young man looked up in a slight alarm. The detective continued: "Didn't you feel sure—knowing Elise Lehman and her affection for you—that even as Baroness Wallroth she might have found a chance to meet you now and then? And would you not have taken advantage of that chance?"

Brantschli sprang to his feet.

"I'm not going to answer any such questions. That's my own affair—and hers—and no one's else, and—"

"And the more you give way to that violent temper of yours, the worse it will be for you," cut in Muller. "I know it does not put either you or the dead girl in a very good light. But we're all human. She is dead; it cannot harm her now. And as for yourself, wouldn't you rather be thought

a bit of a cad than—to be arrested under suspicion of murder?"

"Murder?"

"Yes. I know that Elise Lehman did not kill herself. She was murdered—or killed—by some man—presumably some discarded lover."

Brantschli's face worked; he did not speak for a moment. Then, in an outburst of mingled jealousy and rage, he exclaimed: "Then there were others? And she told me I was the only one that she really cared for—the only one she hated to give up when she married the baron. God, but you can't trust any of them! Not a woman but will lie to a man any time—and all the time. Then there was some one else that thought he was the only one? Poor gump—"

"Thanks; you've told me just what I wanted to know," said Muller after a pause. "Now perhaps you can help me find that 'other one.' I am a detective put on this case by Baron Wallroth to find the man who killed his promised wife."

"He knows? You're sure he don't just think that—to save his face?"

"I know. After what I have seen and heard here—"

"*Murdered?* Good God! Poor girl—and yet—if she's lied to others, as she did to me—"

"You think a man might be carried away—in a moment of desperation? Would you?"

"I? Lord—did you think I—"

Brantschli's sturdy frame quivered for a moment and he stared at Muller, his eyes wide.

"Well—your letters made you my first thought—and you know you have a—h-m—a hasty temper."

"But I never—I wasn't—anywhere near here. I saw the notice in the paper—"

"Then why were you so anxious to get your letters back?"

"I didn't want the baron to find them. Anyway, there wasn't any name on them."

"Then why did you want to get them back?"

Brantschli hesitated, his eyes drooped.

"I—I didn't want him to think any the worse of her—"

"Man alive—don't be ashamed of the

best impulse you've shown since we've been talking here."

"It—seemed sort of silly—"

"Yes—we're inclined to hide our good impulses and boast of the meanest ones. No, I do not think you are the man I am looking for. Here are your letters. You have not seen Elise Lehman since she and you parted in Linz on May 5?"

"No." Brantschli glanced hastily at the letters and slipped them into his pocket.

"Come here—this may comfort you." Muller led him to the little desk calendar, open at May 5, and pointed out the line of writing at the bottom of the leaf. "You see—she kept that date."

"Yes—but who—*who*?"

"The other—may have been as jealous of you as of the baron. Have you any idea who he is? We know that he is a man of normal height and size—by the way, that lets you out, for you are noticeably sturdy—he is between twenty-five and forty, and he is left-handed. I see you are not."

"But I tell you I—" Brantschli turned with a start. He had been looking at the calendar and seemed only just now to grasp the import of the detective's words.

"We detectives have to convince ourselves," said Muller with a smile. "Now, tell me, did you know the dead woman's maid—whom she engaged in Linz?"

"Why, no. Elise told me she had a new maid, but she did not say much about her. I saw the girl once or twice. Rather good looking, I thought, but stand-offish for a servant."

"H-m—yes. And you don't know of any other man?"

"No." Brantschli was surly again, his wounded vanity uppermost.

"Do you know of any gossip?"

"There was some talk in the cafés—late-ly—about a duel between the baron and some other chap—some other rich young fellow—about Elise. I asked her, but she said it wasn't true. They said the other chap had been a friend of hers too—he was badly wounded and went away."

"Have you ever been to Italy?"

"No; they keep me in the country. I don't speak Italian, so I'd be of no use to the firm there."

"Thanks. No, Mr. Brantschli, you are not under suspicion. Will you let me know of anything you hear and see that might bring some light into this affair?"

"Why, certainly. By the way, Elise had a brother—stepbrother—Hubert Lohr."

"Yes, I know. Do you know him?"

"No. He and Elise weren't over friendly. He was sort of uppish and wanted her to live like a nun—far as I can make out. She wasn't going to stand for any such nonsense. But he may know more about—her other friends."

"Yes. I think I'll ask him about them. It can do no harm— Oh, dear me!" Muller went to the window and leaned out. "It's all right, Buchner; you may go back to your work. Tell the others. The gentleman is coming down with me."

"What's all that? You had—constables?"

"Oh, dear, no—only the gardener and my young assistant. You see you came in rather unconventionally."

"Well, you all went out and left all the doors open. I didn't see anybody to announce me."

Brantschli grinned, in spite of his serious eyes.

"There—didn't I tell you we'd be good friends?" said Muller, holding out his hand.

The young man's eyes turned toward the desk again. "But it is terrible."

"Yes. Still, isn't it better than that she should have taken her own life—even if it does hurt you?"

"You're right." Brantschli turned toward the door. "No need of my staying here any longer, is there?"

"No, nor of my staying either."

Muller went downstairs with Brantschli, nodding to the watchful Ossip on a bench by the door. They went out to the gate. Muller waited there after the other had gone, for he saw Commissioner Sennfeld approaching.

"Who was that?" asked Sennfeld.

"Another false clew," answered Muller a bit ruefully. "That was Goldie Boy, and he is as innocent as you and I. And knows as little about it—which is a sad confession for us to make."

"I've had to make so many sad confessions in this matter that I haven't a bit of shame left," laughed Sennfeld. "Can't he give you any help?"

"No. The girl played her cards well. This man was the lover she threw over to marry the baron, but he does not know of any other man except himself and the baron in her life. The mystery deepens with everything I find out. But what brings you here?"

"I phoned the hotel. They told me you were put. We've found the valise."

"Ah—where?"

"Just as you thought, in the pond behind the Artillery Barracks. They dredged the pond and found it, weighted with stones."

"Well, that only confirms our surmise that the man we seek changed his clothes, with Tony's help, just before they hailed the cab. It does not tell us any more than we know already—nor does it tell us who this man is—or who and what Tony really is."

"But you'll find out?" said Sennfeld cheerily.

Muller shrugged his shoulders. "I'll have a look at the pond."

He had already examined it earlier in the day, after talking to the cabman. He found no new clew now.

The veteran detective set his lips and threw his head sharply erect. "I will not give in—not yet," he murmured. "I may be growing old—but I can still do my work."

He gave Ossip final instructions and money, cautioning the lad to take care of his wounded knee.

Then he packed his own grip and studied the railway guide. "No, Vienna first—then Italy. Hubert Lohr may be able to give me some clew."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE IVY COTTAGE.

REFRESHED by an hour in his own comfortable home next morning, Muller started out toward the suburb of Hietzing. He walked by choice, for he

could think best that way. He turned over in his mind the sum of what he had already learned and found it was really more than he had thought in his hour of discouragement. When he came to an open space in the thinning rows of houses he even indulged in a gentle whistle.

Park and meadow land shone in the freshness of early morning; the sun-laden air was rich with the fragrance of myriad flowers. Muller halted on the summit of "Red Hill" as it was popularly called, and drank in the beauty of the glistening city in its ring of woodland and meadows. The Red Hill deserved its name more from the color of its rocky soil than from its height. But it was high enough to afford one of the most charming views of a neighborhood rich in landscape beauty.

A wild apple tree, heavy with pink-tinted blossoms, caught the detective's eye. He glanced about cautiously, then reached up and plucked a long twig thickly sown with the exquisite flowers. The old man laughed like a happy child as he buried his face in the soft petals. It was his capacity for moments like these that kept Joseph Muller the kind, gentle old man he was, after a lifetime of work as "human bloodhound."

Finally he tore himself away from the beauty that filled his soul with cleansing sweetness, and walked on down the further slope of the hill. Half way down he halted again. A woman's voice, deep, rich-toned, sympathetic, rang out through the sun-bathed morning, seeming a part of its glory and fragrance. She was singing an Ave Maria to a melody of noble simplicity. There was an unusual personal quality in the voice. "Her soul speaks through her song," thought Muller as he listened.

The singing came from one of the modest little houses in Red Hill Lane, Muller's own destination. For Hubert Lohr, Elise Lehman's stepbrother, lived in that street.

The old detective stood still, clasping the blossom-laden apple twig to his heart. He did not move until the song came to an end in a burst of joyous melody. Then he walked on slowly, listening to the masterly piano accompaniment which ran on for some few minutes after the singing had

ceased. He stopped again in front of the house from which the music had come, and realised that it was the house he sought. Evidently Hubert Lohr was already at work giving lessons, early as it was.

Muller regretted the interruption his visit must cause, but he felt such a natural desire to see the woman whose voice had so charmed him, that he did not hesitate.

His hand was on the bell at the little gate of the front yard when he heard the same voice, speaking now, from the house.

"Don't bother about it, Hubert. I know it well enough, and you're overworked as it is."

Muller pulled the bell. A woman appeared at a window and asked what he wanted. She was a very attractive young woman. The keen-eyed detective read in the noble lines of her face, the expression of her great eyes, that same quality that had so charmed him in her singing.

"Could I speak to Mr. Lohr?" he asked, raising his hat.

"Surely. I'll let you in at once."

The woman disappeared from the window and came out of the house door a moment later. She opened the catch of the gate to let him in. Muller followed her graceful movements with keen pleasure, noting the while that her still beautiful hands showed marks of hard work.

"Will you come in? My husband is at home. May I ask the name?"

"Joseph Muller. I would like to speak to Mr. Lohr on a matter of official business."

"Official?" Mrs. Lohr looked a trifle surprised. They had already crossed the tiny front yard and were in the dim vestibule.

"I am a detective," replied Muller, "and have come to ask Mr. Lohr to aid me with some information he may be able to give."

Something hard fell to the stone floor with a rattle. It was a big ring of keys Mrs. Lohr had had in her hand when she opened the gate for him. Muller bent and picked it up. She took it with a bow of thanks, but did not speak until she stopped in front of a door down the hall.

"Oh, how stupid I am," she exclaimed. "Here I'm leading you into the kitchen in-

stead of into my husband's room." She laughed a soft, pretty little laugh and turned to another door they had passed a moment before. Muller glanced admiringly at the graceful lines of her tall, slender figure.

She opened the first door and showed him into a small dim room, lighted by one window only, in front of which stood a desk and a open grand piano. The second window in the room was so covered with the heavy growth of ivy that clung to the walls outside that only a dim green twilight filtered through. It made a charmingly cosy intimate corner, furnished with a couple of comfortable chairs and a little table.

Hubert Lohr rose from one of the chairs in the dim corner as his wife entered. He was just lighting a cigar.

"Hubert, this gentleman is a private detective who wants to ask you for some information." Mrs. Lohr ushered Muller in, then went out herself, closing the door behind her.

The detective laid his hat and the apple-blossoms on the piano and turned toward the man who stood waiting by the ivy-shaded window. "I hope I am not interrupting your work, Mr. Lohr. It would be a sorry return for the very real pleasure Mrs. Lohr's singing has just given me."

"Oh—you heard the Ave Maria?" said Hubert Lohr, with an gesture of invitation toward one of the big armchairs.

"Heard it—and felt it deeply." Muller sat down. "Whose composition was it? I thought I knew most good church music, but that song was new to me."

"You really liked it?"

"It touched me deeply."

"I am very glad to hear that. But of course I suppose I shouldn't tell you—now—that I wrote it myself."

"You did? My heartiest congratulations! But—won't you let me see your face? I want to look into the eyes of a man who can feel such music and give it shape and form."

Muller had risen and grasped the young composer's hand. He drew him to the piano and smiled up at the face now full in the light from the other window. "Don't think me foolish—it's odd, but with all the

people I have met in my long life, I have never yet known—never yet stood face to face, like this—with a true creative artist! How wonderful it must be to have such thoughts visit you, and form themselves into beauty in your brain and hand—ah, yes—”

The detective released the other's hand with a light sigh.

“I hardly know whether I—am what you speak of—at least the world doesn't seem to think so yet,” said Hubert Lohr lightly. “My art means poverty as yet, as you see.”

“The more sincere your art, the harder the road it must travel,” said Muller in a tone of true sympathy, as his eye swept the simple room. “But I have no right to take your time like this. I must come to the reason for my visit?”

“Yes, I am greatly interested,” said Lohr quickly. “Did I understand my wife aright? You are a detective and come to me for information? Information about what?”

Hubert Lohr looked at his guest sharply. The keen straight glance of his intelligent eyes suited the firm lines of an attractive face which showed determination and the ability to feel deeply and passionately. He pushed the cigar box toward Muller; and took out a match. “You smoke? It's nicer to talk that way. Well, what can I do for you?”

Muller took a cigar and felt around in his pocket for his cutter. “I've just come from Salzburg,” he remarked casually.

“Oh, from Salzburg,” was all Lohr said. But he sat up more stiffly.

“I come from the house where your sister died,” continued Muller.

“Yes. Well?”

“It had been thought a case of suicide.”

There was a slight pause, then Lohr asked: “*Had* been? Then—it is not certain?” He leaned forward, evidently interested.

“It was a murder—or rather—I am inclined to think—an unpremeditated killing—in a moment of passion.”

Again there was a pause, longer this time. But Lohr's silence was not that of apathy. He was plainly shaken by the

detective's words. Finally he spoke: “Who—whose idea is that?” he asked. “Not yours, of course, for you were called in when—when the explanation of suicide—was not believed?”

“Exactly. I was called in when the explanation of suicide seemed too improbable.”

“Who engaged you?”

“Baron Wallroth—or rather his cousin, Professor Thorn. Do you know him?”

“Not personally. But how did he—”

“Doubt the suicide, you mean? Professor Thorn knew your sister and could not believe that a handsome young woman, gay, pleasure-loving as she was, should have deliberately sought death.”

There was another longer pause, until Lohr, who had been leaning back in his chair, straightened himself up and spoke, his voice harsh with feeling: “Elise was not merely pleasure-loving, she was greedy for enjoyment, greedy for all life had to offer—selfish—and rotten to the very heart of her. A woman like that may well find herself in situations that show no other way of escape—especially a woman as haughty and arrogant as she was. You wonder that I speak so of my sister? I feel more than I say. My father was a simple man, a gardener, but upright and honest. My mother, after his death, married a handsome worthless vagabond whose best deed was that he soon deserted her. Elise is his daughter—from him she inherited her beauty, and her worthlessness. I know her character—and therefore—I did not doubt that she had killed herself.” Lohr's breast rose and fell heavily. He dropped back into his chair again.

“I do not know just how Baron Wallroth looks at it,” said Muller finally. “He has not dealt with me personally. Has he said anything to you?”

“No. He has not given me the slightest intimation that he thought it anything but suicide. I have not seen him since Elise's death. But I had a letter from him, on June 5, in which he told me that he had just returned from Salzburg, from her grave, and asked me not to visit him.”

“Why?”

“He knew that I disapproved of the life

Elise had been leading—and that because of this I did not approve of the engagement. It would have been embarrassing for him to be with me—and would only have renewed his grief. I thought it better to spare him the sight of me and the memories it would call up.”

“But, at other times—you saw him often?”

“Yes, years ago. We have met very little of late. I have not been to the house for many years except when the Baroness has her musical evenings.”

“What sort of a woman is Baroness Wallroth?”

Lohr’s eyes brightened; he smiled happily. “A wonderful woman, an aristocrat in the very best sense.”

“You like her, evidently?”

“I admire her and revere her—as I revere the whole family. It was the late Baron Wallroth who gave me my chance in life. My father was their head gardener, and the baron and his wife took an interest in me, sent me to school and college and then to the Conservatory to study music. Ah—they’ve given me life itself—for music is my life. I really believe I could not live without it—without devoting my whole life to it.”

“You love your art so deeply.”

“It is my very life,” replied Lohr simply.

Muller nodded in sympathy. “Then indeed I can understand your devotion to this family.”

“Oh, if that were all!” exclaimed Lohr. Then he paused, and continued in a calmer tone: “But we are forgetting our chief subject. You can imagine that it interests me most now. Then Professor Thorn does not believe that my sister killed herself?”

“No. He thinks it a case of murder, from revenge or jealous passion. It was he who called me to the case.”

“How did he come to know Elise? He has not been here much of late years.”

“He made her acquaintance in some Berlin dance hall.”

“Ah—then she was in Berlin, too? She never told us, but then I knew mighty little of her life—thank God—” Lohr laughed, a short harsh laugh. “And you? Do you believe that Elise did not kill herself? You

say you come from Salzburg. Have you found any clew, anything that would prove Professor Thorn’s supposition a true one?”

“I have found every evidence to prove that your sister was killed by another’s hand.”

“Will you tell me something of—what you have discovered?” asked Lohr.

“The murderer—it was a man—”

“You’re quite sure it was a man?” cut in Lohr hastily.

“I was afraid it would upset you,” said Muller gently. “Of course it was a man. He was seen entering the house with Miss Lehman and coming out alone. He was seen carrying a valise when he came out, whereas he was empty-handed when he went in with the girl. He stopped on a footbridge over the creek, after he came from the house, and threw one of the murdered woman’s gloves into the water.

“And I know now that in that valise he carried Elise Lehman’s hat, her long black cloth cape and one of her blue silk gowns. He put on these things and came back, after the theater hour, in company with the dead girl’s maid. It was a very clever trick. The housekeeper was made to believe that Elise Lehman was still alive at eleven that evening. And as the killer’s accomplice, the maid, had cleverly arranged an alibi, so that she could not be suspected of having committed the crime, it was naturally taken for a case of suicide. It was all planned and carried out so well, that had it not been for Professor Thorn’s intuition, his feeling for the improbability of such a death at her own hand, the entire matter might have rested there. There would have been no investigation, and the incontestible proofs I have discovered would never have been known. My long experience has taught me that very many crimes would remain unsolved mysteries, or would never be recognized as crimes, but for this wonderful faculty of intuition, as it lives in a keenly sensitized mind.”

“But there is no suspicion—that—that Elise’s maid—might be the—criminal?” asked Lohr tensely.

Muller shook his head. “No, none at all. Although she is undoubtedly connected with the crime in some way.”

"Where is she? Have they found her?"

"No. She has completely disappeared. We cannot find any trace of her nor any information as to who she was—we do not even know her real name. She called herself Tony Schreiner in Salzburg, but left behind her two handkerchiefs with the monogram A. K. And everything she has said about herself, after the murder, proved to be false. She must have been a rather remarkable woman, though, and a very attractive one at that. For the few people who had anything to do with her are quite enthusiastic about her."

"Indeed? Queer, isn't it?" remarked Lohr, with an odd smile. "Then she is only an accomplice?"

"Undoubtedly. But her behavior was most mysterious. And I will confess to you that I haven't the faintest idea where to look for her."

"You don't think she's hiding somewhere in Salzburg?"

"The police have made a thorough hunt for her, and published her description far and wide. I had hoped to find the killer through her, for there is undoubtedly some connection between them. But it looks now as if I could find her only when I have found him. We know something of what he looks like—and this is where I want your help. Do you know of any intimate friend of your sister who could be roughly described as a man of average or normal figure, probably brown-haired and between twenty-five and forty years of age. It's not much to go on, I realize, but we have one valuable peculiarity to help us. He is left-handed. And he is probably either a mountain climber, or a cyclist, for when he was seen he wore sport clothes, knickerbockers and golf stockings. His suit was dark gray. Can you get anything from this that might recall some particular person?"

Lohr had listened carefully, and sat silent in thought. "No—" he said finally. "I can't seem to remember any friend of Elise, of those whom I know, who would fit the description. The use of the left hand is the important point, of course, and I can't remember any left-handed man. I'm afraid I can't give you any help in this matter."

"Somehow, I feel you can," replied the detective. "Do you know a Richard Volkner?"

"Why, yes," answered Lohr, with a slight hesitation. "I know very few of Elise's friends, but I do know Volkner. I knew him before she did. He was my chum in high school—and—I am deeply sorry for this—it was through me that he met Elise. She was acting in the Carl Theater then—it was about three years ago."

"And they were lovers?"

"Yes, but for scarcely six months. Since then—"

"Since then—and in fact, this very winter Mr. Richard Volkner fought a duel with Baron Wallroth. Your sister was the cause."

"Then you know that already? Still even then—"

"He may not have seen anything of her lately? Yes, that is true."

"Then, why are you interested in Volkner?"

"I am interested in any man who was, or still is—Elise Lehman's lover. Volkner was her lover once—are you sure he is not her lover still?"

"I couldn't say, one way or the other. But Volkner is still my friend. And he wrote me recently that he was avoiding women—that sort of woman, for the time being."

"Did he write you from Venice?"

"How did you know he was in Venice? I thought I was the one person who knew his hiding place. You see, he does not want the truth about his health to get out—the real reason for his trouble. He's afraid of how it might affect his father, who is very ill. But, for your purpose, you needn't bother about Richard Volkner. He's had nothing to do with that affair."

"Are you quite sure about that?" asked Muller with a smile. "By the way, the bell is ringing."

Lohr rose and went to the window. A fresh young voice outside called: "Hello there, nobody home? Oh, Lohr—aren't you going to let me in? Where's the mis-sus?"

"Gone marketing, I fancy," answered

Lohr, as he went out after a murmured excuse to Muller about "a friend who's come to take me to a quartet rehearsal."

There was a burst of voices in the hall, and Muller heard the newcomer say eagerly: "Oh, Hubert, what did I tell you? The French courts acquitted that woman who killed her husband—they have some sense about that sort of thing in France! It seems to me that to kill some one we care for, when he hasn't the courage to end his own worthless life, is something to be praised, not blamed."

By this time the two young men were back in the room, and the stranger stopped, startled, when he saw Muller.

"Don't be so reckless with your statements, Raimund," said Lohr after introducing the two. "This gentleman is a detective and will hardly be particularly enthusiastic about your ideas on the subject of murder."

Muller smiled at the newcomer, but his eyes were grave as he spoke. "I too have often felt the deepest sympathy for those whom the law, and the world, call criminal. Many a deed, which the law must punish,

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

has seemed noble and right to me. So you see, our ideas are not so very far apart. But I must go now. I have taken far too much of your time, Mr. Lohr. May I ask you to give these apple-blossoms to your wife, with the assurance of my warmest esteem. I regret that I cannot do it myself."

Lohr took the flowers with an odd smile, and placed them in a vase on the table. Then he nodded to his wife's elderly admirer. "She will appreciate them."

Lohr locked the door of the house behind him, and the three men walked off up the lane.

But the little house was not untenanted.

A hand parted the ivy at the window, very cautiously, and young Mrs. Lohr's pretty but now ghastly pale face appeared in the opening. Her soft eyes, full of a wordless horror, stared after the three figures in the lane.

Then she let the leaves fall back again, swayed, and put out her hand toward the nearest chair. But before she could reach it, the room went dark before her eyes, and she crumpled up on the floor, unconscious.



THE man was dressed in rough clothes suitable for the trail—mackinaw coat, flannel shirt, and paraffin overalls, which were worn outside his high boots to keep the drippings of the underbrush

from soaking his legs. He had stopped to read a sign printed on cloth and nailed to a tree beside the road.

The man carried a pack and a light blanket roll. Beside the pistol attached to his

belt dangled a short-handled ax. He had traveled alone across the summit of the mountains, a three-day journey, making his camps where night found him.

He was a tall fellow, not past thirty in years, though his hair was an iron-gray. He looked peculiarly lean, but by no means a weakling. Rather his leanness was the result of hard training, a wiry, toughened leanness that would count on a hard tramp or in a fight.

As he read the sign the expression of his tanned face changed rapidly from interest to astonishment and finally anger that made his gray eyes narrow and take on dangerous lights.

The cloth on which the sign was printed was comparatively new and made it stand out boldly beside the faded trespass notice of the Swiftwater Hydro Electric Company and the forest ranger's warning against starting fires which were posted on the same tree. The new sign read:

REWARD.

For the arrest and conviction of Ivan King, wanted in connection with the robbery of three thousand dollars in specie from this company's payroll the evening of August 4 on the trail between Twin Falls and Camp Three, a reward of One Thousand Dollars will be paid.

King is a former homesteader of Twin Falls district. Stands six feet one inch; hair dark, streaked with gray; eyes gray; lean; scar over right eye. Radical in tendencies, talks bitterly of water power trust and apt to associate with dangerous element.

In case of arrest notify nearest sheriff, or Swiftwater Hydro Electric Company, Twin Falls, W. Colin Parkinson, Manager.

The wayfarer reading this sign frowned at it as if it were a living enemy. His face turned a dark red and the white scar above his right eye stood out like a brand.

Ivan King breathed rapidly and angrily for several minutes. Then he smiled sardonically as he exclaimed, "Welcome home!"

For a little while he stood, considering the sign with a great deal of concentration. "Description's fair enough," he acknowledged. "The scar especially! H-m! Radical in tendencies, meaning I don't approve of the Swiftwater gang, I suppose. Can't deny that very well! Apt to associate

with dangerous element—they're trying to make me out an anarchist or bolshevist. That touch must have been Parkinson's! Anybody's an anarchist in his estimation that doesn't bow down and kiss the big toe of the Swiftwater. So I got three thousand dollars, did I? Wish I knew where I had hid it!"

He pursed his lips as if to whistle, but did not whistle, only looked thoughtful.

"It kind of changes my plans, for a fact!" he admitted. "I don't believe I'll go to Twin Falls. I'd be too damn welcome there. Now what—"

The road was narrow, wide enough for a wagon or auto truck and no more—and newly constructed. It climbed the steep foothill slope between Twin Falls and Camp Three where the Swiftwater Company was building its big dam and power house.

From along this road, lower down on the mountain, now rose the unmistakable sound made by a light motor car climbing in low gear. Ivan King stopped speculating on his plans to listen and then stepped leisurely into the underbrush and fallen timber that bordered the road on either side. He could see, but was not visible to others.

He sat hidden, awaiting the passing of the automobile and puzzling his brain what he would do.

It was three months since Ivan King had seen the little railroad station settlement of Twin Falls. Previous to that he had lived in or near Twin Falls for seven years, and he had seen the railroad completed and joined to the transcontinental system, watched the country settle and the town grow up. He knew every man and woman and child and dog and cat in the place—and they all knew him.

Ivan King had located a homestead in the cañon up the mountainside, the cañon the Swiftwater Company was now preparing to use as its storage reservoir when the new power dam was finished.

King had opposed the power project from the first, fighting to keep the land he had labored to redeem from wilderness and worked and saved to buy from the government on "commutation." When it was definitely known the company meant to put in the dam, he organized an opposition

among the ranchers, addressed meetings, even led a forlorn lobby to the State capitol—where the fight was lost.

King had been bitter against the Hydro-Electric Company, but the condemnation of the land was approved, and his ranch was taken.

A little time he lingered in Twin Falls, still railing against the invaders and undecided where to go or what to do. His lingering was prolonged finally by the advent of a blond young woman from Seattle, the new private secretary to Colin Parkinson, the resident manager of the development work.

Her name was Pearl Smith, and Ivan King had but to look once into her violet blue eyes to surrender his allegiance for life. He loved her and that was all in the world that interested him, that and trying to win Pearl Smith's return of his volcanic affection.

Something checked his rapid courtship even at the time his chances seemed bright. Ivan King realized one evening, with the suddenness of a lightning flash, that he had nothing to offer the girl but his undying love—and a flesh and blood young woman, used to earning a good living by her own ability, can't be expected to exist on a man's love and nothing else. Love doesn't pay grocer's bills nor the landlord.

King saw with terrifying humility that, economically appraised, he was nobody at all. The small price the court allowed him for the land taken by the power company was mostly spent. He had been idle many months. If he meant to win Pearl Smith as his wife it was up to him first to gain enough to provide for a wife.

He went away suddenly.

To Pearl Smith he merely said good-by and good luck—no more. King had a pride that kept him from confessing his plans. He would succeed first. High time then to come to Pearl and say that he loved her.

Three months he had been away, land cruising mostly in wild places. Luck had deserted him. The desirable wild land had been taken up. He came back, meaning to strike for the coast, and finding Twin Falls not far out of his way discovered that his heart was stronger than his pride. He

thought to stop there, perhaps speak a word to Pearl Smith, win her smile, something—anything—to hearten him in his quest.

And this was what he came home to, a sign posted on a tree advertising a reward for his arrest as a criminal!

II.

THE laboring automobile crawled around a bend of the narrow mountain road and Ivan King recognized it at the first glance. It was the two-seated, battered and muddy little roadster used by officials of the Swiftwater Company to travel between the town and the construction camp.

The man driving it was Colin Parkinson, resident manager of Swiftwater.

Ivan King hated Parkinson for several good reasons. For one, Parkinson represented the triumphant corporation that had ousted him from his land. That was bad enough, and the man's complacent superiority and swank made it worse. Another very good reason was that as Pearl Smith's employer Colin Parkinson daily sat for hours in the company of that young woman, laughing with her, joking her, practicing little familiarities, noticed by King in many jealous glances which made his blood too hot for his good health. That Parkinson was married did not abate his ardor in the least.

Parkinson wore a heavy, belted mackinaw and a rough tweed hat, for the late afternoon was chilly. He, too, was a big man—big, handsome and a little beefy.

When King saw Parkinson driving the laboring little car that ground its weary way through the ruts, radiator boiling, he saw red for a moment.

His hand, without any conscious thought on his part, went toward the pistol in the leather holster.

"Accuses me of robbing that payroll, does he?" King growled to himself.

Then the actions of Colin Parkinson became strange, weird, and the hidden man traded his anger for astonishment.

Colin Parkinson stopped the little automobile and got out, carrying a small, black leather bag, which he deposited carefully

at the side of the road. He remounted again, backed and slued the car crosswise to the highway, started it and leaped to the ground.

There was a little hollow at this point and a bank dropped away from the road. The automobile bounded off the latter and down the bank. As it went it turned over and crashed into a stump.

Parkinson stood on the road above it, viewing the wreck with evidence of satisfaction.

King saw him lift the cloth hat from his head and toss it beside the wrecked machine, replacing it with a cap drawn from his coat pocket. Stranger still, he drew a pistol and fired several shots into the wrecked automobile, shots that left their mark on the machine. The mud of the road he trampled without regard for boots or wet feet.

Finally Parkinson looked on this handiwork of his, and from his pose and expression pronounced it good. He picked up the black bag and struck into the underbrush, coming straight toward the hidden man.

III.

IVAN KING flattened himself behind a log and held his breath while the resident manager of the Swiftwater Company passed not six feet away, carrying the black bag. Parkinson's ruddy, handsome face was placid and there was a shadowy smile about his full red lips.

When he had gone King sat up and his eyes were wide open. "Dog bite my cat!" he drawled slowly, and rising, pushed into the forest, paralleling the progress of Parkinson.

The light began to fade and dark came hesitatingly, then conquering with a rush. The sky turned black and many stars glittered in it. The woods were a stygian gloom.

Colin Parkinson progressed like a man who knew exactly where he was going. He made noise enough to guide the one who followed, using a woodsman's cunning and patience.

Eventually the two men went down a long hillside of another ravine far to one

side of the road and the construction camps. King knew the place. There was an abandoned mine near the foot of the slope and he had sheltered in its shaft house from storms. He saw now that the door of the shaft house stood open, marked by a dim light. That was Parkinson's objective.

The door of the shaft house closed on Parkinson, and King felt his way close against its wall. The building was a shed of planks, covered with tar-paper. As King drew near a coat or blanket or newspaper was spread across its one window, shutting out the light and spoiling an outsider's view of the interior. But the walls were thin, and cracks had developed between the warping planks and King could hear what was being said.

For talk was going on. Somebody waited for Colin Parkinson at the abandoned mine, and that some one was a woman. King knew with her first words that she was not Parkinson's wife.

Mrs. Parkinson, red-haired, unhappy, neurotic, overdressed, had a voice peculiarly rasping that everybody in Twin Falls knew and sometimes, in mockery, mimicked. Nobody could hear her voice and confuse it with another woman's. The woman who was talking to Parkinson spoke in a low tone, rather musically.

When Ivan King heard the voice he flushed hot all over. He was astounded. He began to shiver with a fever that was awful. Resolutely his heart denied the testimony of his ears.

"It is not!" his heart cried. "Nobody but a yellow dog would even think such a thing about—her. Whatever this woman is—and I can imagine her sort!—she must be at the bottom of this thing. It was bound to be a woman when Parkinson was concerned."

As Parkinson turned from covering the window the woman had spoken first, a little sharply and peremptorily. "No! Don't—not here—not now!"

"Not one kiss!" Parkinson exclaimed.

"Please! Later, when we get away—"

"Well, you are a funny one! Haven't kissed me yet. However— Did you get out of town all right. Nobody wise to you?"

"Nobody guessed a thing, I'm sure. I did as you told me. Packed nothing. Just went for the usual stroll after work—and continued on to this place—"

"Good enough! In a little burg like that—where every tongue wags and every house has at least one woman's eyes watching and spying—you've got to be careful, I tell you. Damn these hick town gossips—damn their towns!"

"Yes, I agree. Damn them—"

"And if that red head—if my wife knew—about us—"

"Your wife! Don't—" A pause. Then she exclaimed, "But you brought a bag, I see?"

"Oh, this! Well, this is carfare." Parkinson chuckled humorously and there was a moment's silence in which, evidently, he displayed the contents of the small satchel he carried, for the woman cried out, "Money! Where in the world did you get all that money?"

"Don't tell the world about it!" he reproved sharply. Then playfully, "Now, now! Don't ask too many questions. It's money. Let it go at that. Money we're going to spend buying you pretty things to wrap those pretty shoulders and make all the men mad with jealousy of me when we get to Honolulu. Remember, it takes money to keep a girl like you happy in this world!"

"Yes, it does. I hope there's enough—"

"Hunh! Well, just lift aside that loose plank in the floor and tell me what you see under it."

Came the muffled sounds of a board being moved and then the woman's exclamation, "Another little black bag!"

"Right, my dear! Bring it here."

"And that's full of money, too! Why, Colin!"

Parkinson chuckled. "Enough to pay for our honeymoon, I guess. Yes, and leave a little over. Eight thousand in all—"

"But where—where did you get all this?"

"Told you I'd surprise you, didn't I, girlie?"

"But I don't understand. Colin, you never saved all that from your salary—"

"Saved it! Hah, that's good—awfully good! Save it out of my salary with that

red-headed hag—excuse me, I mean the highly esteemed Mrs. Parkinson—blowing my money like a drunken sailor. Save it? What a chance!"

"Then, how—"

"Girlie, we can't stop to worry about that now. We've got a long, hard night trip up the trail and round about to the railroad. Then Spokane, then double back again to the coast and to San Francisco and the steamship. You'll have to forget those questions for to-night. We're not out of the woods yet, just because we've outwitted those delightfully thick-headed yokels at Twin Falls. Later—"

The woman gave a low exclamation. "Colin Parkinson! This is the payroll for the construction camp. I typewrote this checking list this very afternoon—"

Parkinson said irritably, "All right. What of it—"

"And this other! That's the payroll stolen in August!"

"I admit it."

"Then you—you took that money!"

"Does it matter a damn who took it—or how it was taken—or why. We've got it, now, for Heaven's sake forget—"

"You did take it. Admit it!"

"Oh, forget this stuff! What—"

"Admit it! I won't go a step until you do. You staged that robbery yourself—and took the money."

Parkinson exclaimed sulkily, "Suffering wildcats! What difference does it make? If that isn't like a woman—well, then I did. I took the money. Now I hope you—"

The sentence was never finished. At that instant Ivan King burst in the door of the shaft house with a slam and loomed there, menacing and terrible in the yellow light of candles that stood on a shelf.

King held his pistol ready, and it covered Parkinson instantly.

"I've heard all I need to hear," he exclaimed. "Your game is up, Parkinson."

As the door burst open the woman screamed and sprang back. Instantly, as if guided by overwhelming instinct, her hand caught at the loose cape wrapped about her and shielded her face.

King's next words were addressed to her.

"I don't know who you are," he said bitterly. "I've not seen your face—and don't want to. You have done a mad thing, coming here with this man. From your talk you intended doing worse—running off with another woman's husband. I don't know if you have any shame or not, but I'm going to give you the benefit of a doubt. I'm going to give you a chance to go back wherever you belong, and I don't want to see your face just for that reason. I'll never know who you are—and nobody else will ever know a woman was mixed up in this. Are you armed?"

The woman nodded her veiled head.

"Throw your pistol on the floor."

She fumbled in her dress and threw a small weapon at his feet.

"There's a lean-to there," King said, pointing to a door. "Used to be the coal shed when there was a hoisting engine in this room. Go in there. When I'm gone you can leave—and if you take my advice you'll go back to an honest job and a decent life."

There was a bitterness like some corroding acid in his voice. He stood panting when he had finished speaking. His face wore a grimness, a pallor that was dreadful to see.

The woman, keeping her face well hid, bowed her head and went into the lean-to shed without a word.

IV.

KING made an effort to conquer his emotion and turned his attention to Parkinson. The manager of the Swiftwater had said nothing. The ruddy face was a dirty white, and his eyes, which never left King's, had the look of some unclean little animal's eyes when it is cornered and knows it must die.

King considered Parkinson thoughtfully. "If I killed you," he muttered, "nobody could blame me. I wonder if that isn't the simplest thing to do. I wonder."

Parkinson tried to swallow, tried to speak, and failed at both attempts. His muscles would not function.

King stepped close to him, and the general manager shrank back and back until

he was pressed against a square post of the shack, an upright that once had held a pulley wheel. King's hand went through his pockets, hunting for weapons, and at the touch Parkinson shivered. King found the man's pistol, and took possession of it.

"Quite a game you've been playing—quite a smart little game!" King's smile was not nice to see. "Staging a little hold-up of yourself to cover your stealings, eh? Smart idea! And blaming it onto me! That was another bright idea. Of course you should fret about how I felt coming back here and finding myself posted as a thief—you should worry about anybody but yourself and your own little schemes!"

King's anger rose for a moment to boiling point. The pistol in his hand was clasped tighter and with a murderous intent. His lips parted in a ghastly sort of grin. The gray eyes took on a red light that was fearful.

Parkinson gasped and shut his own eyes, and his knees bent weakly.

"No, I won't kill you," King announced. He had fought back that impulse by a great effort. "That wouldn't help me—and it wouldn't hurt you half as much as you deserve. Parkinson, hand me that rope that hangs behind you!"

To reach the coil of rope hanging on the post Parkinson had to turn around, but he tried to keep his eyes on King, his head turned over his shoulder while his hand groped for the rope. The action was grotesque.

King took the rope and cast a loop about his prisoner and the post with one hand. He tightened it savagely, then with both hands—for there was no longer any reason to cover his prisoner with the pistol—he wound loop after loop, lashing the general manager flat against the upright timber. He did the job so thoroughly that Parkinson took on the appearance of an Egyptian mummy in its swathings.

"Now," said King, "I'm going for the sheriff. I'll take charge of these pay rolls. I'll see that the sheriff gets them—and gets you."

He hesitated a moment, then went to the closed door that led to the lean-to shed.

"Come out of there," he called to the

woman. "I will keep my back to you. I haven't any curiosity about you. You may come out and walk out of this place. I sha'n't require you, even as a witness. Nobody will ever know. Are you coming out?"

King turned his back to the door and walked a few paces away. He heard the door scrape open and the light, quick step of the woman. The step faltered.

"Don't linger," King said sharply. "You'll need to escape the gossip of Twin Falls."

The woman had turned toward him, her hands stretched out in a queer, involuntary gesture that seemed to ask for a hearing—or some special clemency.

At King's words she was about to obey, but the sound of a man's voice came from outside the shanty. She gasped with fright.

King had heard. "Damn!" he said. "Well—back into the shed. That's the only chance for you now."

Somebody knocked at the shaft-house door—a loud, peremptory knock.

"Hurry," King advised. The door to the lean-to closed as he pulled open the outer door.

A man and a woman burst into the shaft-house.

The man took in the scene with a glance, and he backed King against the wall at the point of a pistol, disarming his prisoner with practiced speed.

"I wasn't expecting you," he said to King. "You've got a nerve, coming back here!"

He turned to Parkinson. "Well, Mr. Parkinson, what's this—another hold-up of the pay roll?"

"You can see for yourself," Parkinson burst out. "That's Ivan King, sheriff."

"And he tried it again! We-e-l-l, the son of a gun!"

"The pay roll's in that bag," Parkinson went on. "And the missing August one's in the other. He hid it here. I suppose you found my auto—and followed—"

"No," said the sheriff uneasily. "We—that is—" His eyes turned toward his woman companion.

Parkinson, who was tied too securely to

turn his head at all, had not seen her before. When he did his eyes bulged.

She spoke in a voice peculiarly rasping. "Where's that young woman?"

"Yes!" the sheriff exclaimed. "Where—that is—er—is there a woman? Did you come here with a woman?"

"Bosh!" snarled Mrs. Parkinson. "Of course he did. Didn't I get that letter? Where's that woman? Trot her out!"

"What woman?" Parkinson sulked. He turned his eyes toward King as if to ask a question.

"What woman!" Mrs. Parkinson planted herself before her husband. "Don't try that stuff on me. If it isn't one woman it's another with you—all the time. You thought you were putting over something on me, I suppose? Well, this time I caught you with the goods. You brought a woman here—and you intended to run off with her—desert your wife—"

"Ah, who says I did?"

"This says you did. The whole town must know it when somebody goes to the trouble of writing me a letter." Mrs. Parkinson waved a pink envelope in her husband's face. "Sheriff Kaynor," she snapped, "find that little yellow-haired fool. She's here."

Kaynor, the sheriff, turned uneasily toward King. He did not relish his job. "Where's the girl Parkinson had with him—or met here? She's here, isn't she?"

"There's no woman here—and I got here as soon as Parkinson did," King said coolly. "Now, about this pay roll. Sheriff, I accuse Parkinson himself of robbing the company, and before I get through I'll prove it. I saw him ditch his car and bring that sack of money here. Saw him dig up that other bag from under the floor—"

"Likely, isn't it?" Parkinson sneered. "He held me up on the trail, almost exactly where he did before. I slued the car into the ditch, trying to get away from him. But he caught me and brought me here and tied me. Going to leave me to starve to death in this hole, I suppose—"

"You heard my story," King protested.

Parkinson laughed triumphantly. "Your story! A fine time you'll have proving it! Where's your witnesses?"

As if this were her cue, Mrs. Parkinson repeated her parrot cry: "Where's that woman? Find that woman! Never mind this talk—bring out that yellow-haired adventuress!"

"If there is any witness or any evidence to prove what you say, King, I'd advise you to produce it," the sheriff said sternly.

"There's no witness here," King maintained. "There is no woman, I repeat. But—"

"There's another door!" Mrs. Parkinson screamed. "They hid her in there. Now we'll see!"

She ran toward the door of the lean-to. King sprang to interpose his body.

V.

"MRS. PARKINSON," King said sternly, "listen to me. I thoroughly agree with you about your husband. He's a yellow dog. There is no polite word that describes what he is. I don't doubt for a moment that he would misconduct himself with a woman—any woman silly enough to think him worth the risk—"

"He met a woman here, I tell you! I got a letter, a warning, late this afternoon, telling me all about it. And that woman is hid—"

"No woman is hid here," King maintained steadily. "You have my word for that—"

"Your word! Bosh!"

"My word!" King's eyes flashed. "Do you think I am a fool? Do you think if there was a woman here, a witness to what I say— See here, I stand here falsely accused. This husband of yours framed up evidence that convicts me of robbing the company's pay roll messenger; declares that to-night I brought him here to rob the company again. Do you know what it means if they prove that? It means life imprisonment for me. If there was a woman here—if that woman was my own mother, or my own sweetheart—d'you think I'd shield her now!"

The man's low tone, his suppressed vehemence that trembled in every word and tone, his desperate face, awed the red-haired wife.

Mrs. Parkinson hesitated and stepped back. "Just the same," she repeated stubbornly, "there is a woman."

"You are quite right, Mrs. Parkinson. I am the woman."

The door of the lean-to opened and the woman came into the light.

King stepped back unsteadily, making a weak gesture with his hands—a gesture of surrender. His head sank, and he turned his eyes aside, resolutely refusing to look at the yellow-haired girl who faced them.

Parkinson groaned: "You—you damn fool!"

The sheriff's mouth fell open.

"Ah!" Parkinson's wife burst out shrilly. "You! Just like the letter said. Well, Miss Pearl Smith!"

"Just like the letter said," Pearl Smith agreed. "Because I wrote that letter to you myself, Mrs. Parkinson. I needed you and the sheriff here to-night—and I was pretty sure that would bring you."

As she hesitated nobody said anything nor moved. The silence was like a spell of magic.

Pearl Smith walked over to the sheriff and took him by the arm.

"Don't bother to untie that man until you handcuff him," she said, pointing to Parkinson. "I have a complete case against him—embezzlement of funds, robbery of the Swiftwater Company's pay rolls, false accusations against King—everything."

Sheriff Kaynor gasped foolishly. "Well, what—well, who—just how—"

Pearl Smith turned back her cape and showed the sheriff a badge. She handed him a card of identification. The sheriff whistled shrilly.

"Oh, great guns! Excuse me, Miss— But who'd have figured on that?"

"Exactly," she agreed. "The Swiftwater Company had reason to suspect Parkinson some time before the pay roll robberies. There had been other embezzlements, rather cleverly covered up. The Bankers' Detective Agency was consulted—and I was sent up here as Parkinson's secretary. To-night I had to arrange this little affair to wind up my case—and the letter to Mrs. Parkinson was part of it—"

meant to bring you here, sheriff. If you take my advice you'll not hold King any longer. He has a pretty big reason for feeling sore as it is—"

"You hear, King," said the sheriff. "You're not under arrest any longer."

King nodded, his eyes still avoiding the blue eyes of Pearl Smith. "If you don't mind, then, sheriff—I'll be on my way."

"Need you later as a witness, of course."

"You'll find me when you want me."

King started toward the outer door, his gaze fixed steadily downward.

"Wait!" Pearl said sharply. "Wait. I must see you—a minute. Sheriff, please take these people down the trail. We'll be right along."

When the sheriff and the Parkinsons were gone the girl turned toward King.

"I just—wanted you to—understand—that's all," she said unsteadily. "I never was very proud of my—profession, King. My father was a detective all his life. He

taught me the tricks. When rheumatism crippled him, and I had to earn a living for us both, that was the only thing that paid enough. Doctors cost so much! But I never had a case—like this before. It was my first big chance. If I had known what it would lead to!" She shivered. "But, King, you must understand! Once the thing was undertaken—once I had started my case I had to go through with it. Like a soldier. Orders, you know. And the moral obligation. I had to do things, and pretend things, that—that hurt me so—"

"Don't!" King exclaimed. "Don't! You explaining to me! You—almost apologizing! Why, I'm the one—it's the things I thought and felt—jumping to conclusions when all my love for you told me they were lies. I'm the one to ask your forgiveness. I do ask it—"

He got no further. Pearl Smith was in his arms, granting not only her forgiveness but her lifelong love.



South of Fifty- Three

Part VI

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "The One Way Street," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHISPERS IN THE DARK.

UNHAPPY weather hung on the heels of the Karluk as though the night of drizzle in which she left Seattle Harbor was some sort of magic spell that

could not be banished. It was still too early in the year to hope for much relief, and the North Pacific was turbulent with gales and squalls of snow and sleet, damp, clinging fogs and temperatures that made men shiver in spite of heavy mackinaws and pea-jackets.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for March 25.

From the time the stout wooden steamer dropped Cape Flattery Light they would be out of sight of land until they raised Kodiak Island. Captain Blye had orders to find this landfall. Then Hayes would give him further instructions.

Blye displayed no surprise at his peculiar orders. He nodded assent and went about his business. They saw the captain only at meals, and not always then. Socially he could scarcely be called an addition to any circle. With his peculiar economy of words he could manage to answer the most involved question or discussion in five seconds flat, and he never argued the point. If undisturbed, he ate without a word, and sometimes his frosty blue eyes stole sly glances about the table. But what he thought of them all and their enterprise he kept to himself.

When they established beyond a doubt that Al Sapley was left on the dock in Seattle, Hayes suggested stopping at Fort Townsend to send a telegram. The matter was discussed and vetoed.

"He meant to stay ashore," Beach argued. "There isn't any other explanation. He's a rotten little quitter!"

"Unless he got tangled up in all that junk and fell off the dock," Marion suggested.

Hayes could not understand it. "But he meant to go! He was so enthusiastic! He did nothing that last day but buy things—like a small boy going camping."

"Then the small boy got cold feet when you cut him down to one rifle with which to face the wilderness," Beach grinned.

Marion suggested another explanation. "Al Sapley has a twisted sense of humor. He's a great little practical joker. I've seen him go to no end of trouble to make a fool of himself and then get his reward by laughing at the people who were simple enough to think he did not know better. It's a queer, inverted sort of egotism. It would be like the little rat, exactly, to go to all that trouble and mean to fool us all the time! He's probably laughing to himself right now."

Hayes exclaimed hopelessly, "I can't make it out. He seemed so anxious to go and help us!" He was bewildered and hurt by Sapley's desertion. He liked Sapley.

The routine of the Karluk was monotonous to the point of madness. Bad weather kept them closely indoors. They had only their thoughts for company. But as the steamer neared her western Alaskan destination a restlessness came over Jonathan Hayes. It was as if the man smelled the land that was his home. He was much on deck in spite of sleet and damp, staring into the vast, gray, ever-shifting horizon where the snow ghosts danced. With each breath he seemed to expand and grow. All trace of the weariness, the beaten look he had worn on Broadway was gone. He laughed often and sang old songs under his breath.

Marion, muffled against the damp and cold, ventured out after the evening meal, determined to get some exercise and fresh air in spite of weather. She discovered Hayes by the rail near the bow, his usual post. He was staring steadily into the blackness and she heard him singing to himself. The Karluk pitched and sent her staggering against him.

Hayes caught her and held her fast. "You have no business going out alone on deck," he growled. "Especially at night. Suppose you had gone over the rail—who would have seen you in this muck?"

"Don't be sore when you ought to feel so happy, Hayes!"

"I am happy. I never felt like this in all my life, so alive and full of hope and dead sure that I'm going to whittle out life to suit myself!" Hayes established her firmly against the rail and he shielded her there, safe. "And how about you?" he asked.

"Me!"

"Yes. How do you feel? What do you think about all day, I wonder? I wonder if you're getting the solid satisfaction—happiness—you ought to get from doing a big thing? Because you did a big thing, the biggest thing any human being can do. You picked up a man who was beaten by life and set him on his feet again. Doesn't that make you feel proud?"

"Oh, that! Hayes, you will insist on making a mountain out of little things. All I did was give you some advice about where to get money—and a few things like that.

"You did the dirty work yourself. And heaven knows I owed you what little help I could give! Set you on your feet? I didn't have half as much to do with that as I did about rolling you in the mud in the first place!" She shivered.

Hayes said softly, "You're a very splendid—courageous—wonderful woman, Marion—"

"Oh, please, not that—"

"Just that! My dear, my dear, if you knew how I have watched you these last few weeks, how I've appreciated the things you did so bravely and cheerfully—and laughed at and called nothing! And how I wished I had the words to say to you that I understood and loved you for them. And once I called you a tinsel woman! You remember? Over there on Kalvik, somewhere out there ahead of us, when we stood on the beach and saw the yacht coming? Marion! Can you ever forgive me that?"

Marion heard this in a kind of shivering delight—a delight that was a good part terror. Hayes must not be let say these things! Her bargain with Beach was made and she never welshed on her promises, as Beach reminded her when she made it. Hayes must not be let to hope—not even for a minute. She summoned all her will. "Hayes," she said sharply in her best Broadway manner, "let's not get sloppy! The weather's bad enough—"

"I'm talking sense. I'm talking the truest common sense there is, dear, when I say I love and reverence you—"

Marion giggled audaciously. "You look as if you were preaching my funeral eulogy! 'She mimicked his words, "'I love and reverence you!' Oh, Hayes, when you roll your eyes that way!"

Her words hurt him. She saw it in his face and the glowing eyes and in his manner. He was hurt, and the knowledge hurt her until she wanted to cry out.

After a silence Hayes said quietly, "I am very sorry if I seem ridiculous. What I feel is not amusing—"

She caught his arm tight and pressed it. "I know! I do understand. But—"

Hayes's arms were about her. He held her tightly while he said hurriedly, "Then you know that I love you. That I have

loved you from the minute you came to Kalvik—always—in spite of everything! And now—now that I'm going to succeed, going to prove myself against that world of yours, I want you to keep your promise and listen to me—"

"Promise!"

Fright had made her voice harsh.

"Yes, your promise, made to me that night on Fox's yacht. You promised then you would wait for me—until I succeeded—"

"Yes, *until you succeeded!*" She managed to laugh again, mocking him. "Careful, sucker! You're not out of the woods yet. This is no time to yell!"

"I will do what I set out to do!"

"So you say—"

"I'm not boasting without cause. I'm going to do this thing. And then you must listen when I ask you to marry me!"

"I—if I made that promise, Hayes—"

"You did make that promise!"

"Yes, yes! But not now! You must not ask me now! You must not—"

"You don't care! It's no use asking you?"

She pulled away from him, panting a little. She was terrified at what she might say, realizing that her secret must be kept from him still—kept from him until he had done what he set out to do—and terrified lest he guess that secret.

"You—you don't know me. Not really," she said hurriedly. "How can you know what goes on inside my head—in my heart? If you could see what is there, how utterly trivial I am—how worthless—"

"Marion!"

"I am! I'm exactly what you said—a tinsel woman. It's Broadway—it's in my blood. Hayes, can't you understand I'm not your sort—I'm not worth it!"

"You sha'n't say that! That's not true!"

"It is true! It's true. True! Hayes, you must understand. I—I'm not even decent."

"What's this?"

"In my thoughts I'm not. In my heart I'm not. I'm no good. No good! A rotten, bad lot. Not decent!"

Hayes was protesting hotly. "Marion,

this is all nonsense. You must never say a thing like that! I won't let you say it—"

But she interrupted so earnestly he was silenced. "Take me to my stateroom. Now. Don't say a word more. Not one word. And don't let me talk of this again. Do you understand? Not now!"

Hayes took her arm and led her to her little cabin. At the door he said gravely, "Nothing you say can frighten me—or change me. I love you."

The door was slammed in his face. On the inside Marion leaned weakly against the panels. "Oh, dear God!" she sobbed.

Hayes tramped the deck a couple of hours more, soaked without and raging hot within. Finally he went to the little general cabin that was dining room and saloon and office at times, and found Beach yawning over a novel.

"You look like a drowned rat," Beach said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"It looks like nothing! Your face is whiter than this page. Here, take a drink!"

Hayes drank what was given him without any consciousness of the act.

Beach made him lay off his wet coat. "I'll deal you a few poker hands," he suggested cheerfully.

"Cards! I haven't the stomach for that to-night, Beach."

"Too bad you don't like cards. Stupid things! But they keep a man from eating his heart out with this damned waiting—waiting!"

"Waiting is pretty nearly over," Hayes said. "Two days, three at the outside, and we ought to reach that"—he looked about sharply—"we ought to reach our port," he amended.

"Suppose Blye's reckoning is all right?" Beach grunted. "No landfall since we left Flattery! Not even a clear day to shoot the sun! All he's got to go by is the log. If this boat's as fast as he claims I'm a poor guesser!"

"The thick weather is one blessing, at least—"

"What's that, Hayes?"

"Cook—if Cook happens to be following us. He would have a sweet time keeping on our trail these days!"

Beach looked thoughtful, a little encouraged. "I suppose he would! And it did look in Seattle as if somebody was on our trail. I'm glad it's going to be decided soon! I can remember pleasanter excursions than this—"

"It's pretty fine of you to come, Beach. You know how much this means to me. I—I hope you know how much I appreciate your help—all your trouble—your friendship—" Hayes choked. "I can't say it—to-night. But, thanks!" He grasped Beach's hand and turned away. "I'm going to bed."

Beach looked long and thoughtfully at the door after it had closed on Hayes. "He doesn't know!" he thought. "He hasn't even a suspicion yet! I'm almost sorry for that big innocent—but we can't both have Marion—and I mean to!"

Marion found her little cabin intolerable. She could not sleep, she could not rest or even stay still because of the jangle of emotions Hayes had started. She wrapped herself finally and went out into the night again. A high wind and the pitching of the Karluk made walking the deck almost impossible. She found a shelter in the angle of the deck house near the bridge and sat down on the coaming of a skylight. The vessel's stack was close by and radiated warmth. The fresh air was delicious. Her aching head quieted.

Her mind could not leave her troubles. It was a ghastly mess and no mistake. Yet a month ago this would have seemed the logical solution. A couple of months ago to promise Beach would have been the realization of an ambition. She was doing what she had planned to do last summer: winning the man so many ambitious girls had tried for—and doing Hayes a good turn besides. Why wasn't she glad about it? Why wasn't she tickled pink? Life had got itself so balled up she couldn't be sure about anything—yes, one thing! When Hayes found out her promise to Beach—that would be tough on Hayes—pretty darn tough!

Yet the warmth and the stinging freshness of the salt air brought quiet of a sort. She ceased to think at all, lulled by the unceasing harping of the wind in the stays that held the big stack, and the regular

roar and long-drawn hiss of waves racing past in the blackness. Perhaps she even dozed a little.

The murmur of two men's voices caught her wandering attention. She realized sleepily that she was leaning against the wall of the deck house and beneath a cabin port. Somebody was talking in there—two men talking—questions and answers and a chuckle or two. One of them must be Captain Blye. The other—

Marion stiffened bolt upright. She did not breathe in the intensity of her effort to listen. An ice-cold wave of fright went tingling through her, a true nightmare fright, for her reason tried to reassure her she had not heard right.

She craned her head and glanced up at the cabin port. It had been screwed open a crack for ventilation. She rose to her feet to press her ear closer, though the effort to coördinate her fear-bound muscles was agonizing. She clung to the wall, raising her head slowly, fearfully toward the port.

A murmured phrase leaked out, then Blye's nasal twang. "Wait. Port's open. Colder than Greenland to-night."

A few inches from her head the captain's hand clamped the window into its socket.

Presently she ventured to look, hoping that a glance into the cabin would dispel her nightmare phantasy. But a curtain had been drawn across the glass.

Marion ran down the deck, staggering with the lurching of the plunging steamer, careless of all risk of falling, of being washed off by some marauding wave.

Beach and Hayes had cabins side by side, next to her own. All opened on deck and were in the after-deck house. She hammered frantically at one door, then the other, whispering the men's names.

Beach, who had scarcely entered his cabin, opened his door first. She clutched at him when Hayes's door opened and he came out, coatless.

Marion dragged them both into Beach's cabin. She was white and breathless, and her brown eyes were big and round. She looked like a child terrified by a bad dream.

"On this boat!" she whispered, shuddering and clawing at them. "On this very boat. He's on this boat!"

"Who? What? Marion, child, you're shivering! You're sick!"

They pushed her gently onto Beach's berth, and Beach made her drink something warming from his flask.

"Easy now!" Hayes was saying comfortingly. "What's scared you? Who's on this boat?"

"Whoever it is won't hurt you. We'll look after it," Beach reassured her. "Now, who—"

"Cook!"

The men stared blankly.

"Captain Darius Cook!" Marion repeated frantically. "He is! I heard him—heard him talking. In the cabin. With Blye. I was at the window. I heard Cook's voice."

Hayes slammed out of the cabin and reappeared in a moment, fully dressed. His hand slipped a pistol into the coat pocket as he came in. He found Beach ready.

"Stay right here," they advised the girl.

"Don't—don't do—anything—"

"Nothing foolish," Hayes promised, and they hurried to the deck.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PLACE WITHOUT A NAME.

BEACH grasped Hayes's arm and halted him.

"Wait," he murmured. "We've got to use a little strategy. If that should be Cook we want to know it, but we do not want to let him know we know—not until we've thought things out. Let's figure out how to go at this—"

"You're right, Beach! If Cook is aboard we could get rid of him at Kodiak if we surprised him—"

"I can't believe it's he! Marion's been dreaming!"

"You don't know Cook. I do! Now, what's your plan?"

"I'll talk to Blye. If our man's hid in that cabin, you'll have a chance to look about. See what you can find out—but don't give yourself away!" Beach laughed shortly. "What utter rot! You'd think this was a melodrama. Marion must have dreamed it. The girl's unstrung!"

Even Hayes smiled a moment. "I begin to agree with you. Well, we had better look. It will satisfy her."

Beach's knock at the cabin door brought a sharp query from Captain Blye. "Well?"

"It's Beach and Hayes. May we come in?"

After a moment of waiting Blye opened the door. The captain was coatless and without shoes. He rubbed his eyes as they entered.

The master's cabin was a little larger than the staterooms, but equally bleak. There were two seats and a small business desk built into the bulkhead. Against the inner wall of the room, in an alcove, was his berth, the curtains drawn. Their first searching glances discovered everything as it should be, except those drawn curtains of the berth—and that was no unusual thing.

Blye maintained his customary silence as they seated themselves. He was the picture of a man roused from a nap and not overwhelmed with delight at the interruption.

"We got to wondering about progress," Beach was explaining affably as he leaned near the captain. "Hope you don't mind the interruption too much. You see neither of us knows anything of navigation—"

"Thought you owned a yacht?"

"Well! You must have been looking up my family tree!"

"Naturally. Business. Might say common sense—"

"I do own a yacht. But I don't know how to run it. Well, are you going to deliver the goods—will we see Kodiak tomorrow?"

Blye reached into the business desk and produced his log. He picked up paper and pencil and began to explain his calculations to Beach.

The sportsman leaned forward, all attention and questions, managing by his bulk to shield Hayes from the captain. Hayes rose as if to come closer and look over their shoulders. The ship lurched and he staggered with it, straight back against the closed curtains of the berth.

The curtains parted with his weight and he half sat, half sprawled on the floor.

The maneuver had all the appearance of a landsman's clumsiness at sea.

Blye raised a frosty blue eye.

"Seasick?" he twanged sharply.

Hayes looked apologetic. "I never could make my feet track on a boat!" He rose and rejoined them, bracing his swaying figure against the wall.

Beach studied the captain's calculations with wrinkled brow. "It beats me!" he exclaimed. "You mean to say without anything to go by but this dead reckoning, you expect to pick up a pin point on the globe? God!"

"Ain't be'n off yet. Be'n sailin' sixty-five years. Never off more'n fifty miles."

Both men murmured appropriate applause. "When you pick up the island," Hayes said with a yawn, "go round into Shelikof Strait. We'll have to stop near Uyak for a bit."

"Stop!" Blye exclaimed sharply.

Beach looked a little surprised.

"Native pilot in the village there," Hayes murmured. "We're going to need his help to get to where we're going."

Blye shrugged. "Look here. Hope you understand this ain't no *bidarka*. This boat draws water and I ain't goin' to throw her away on no reef."

"That's why I want my pilot, captain."

Beach yawned and proposed they go to bed. Blye saw them out with his usual emphatic silence.

Safely away from the cabin Beach asked sharply: "Well?"

"That cabin is as empty as the day it was built. Nobody is hiding in it. No sign of anybody having been there."

"I thought as much! Marion dreamed it!"

"Looks that way. But it's a queer dream. Beach, I don't like that kind of dreams. We'll look sharp and ask some questions of the crew to-morrow. I threw in the stop at Uyak just to make sure we had an excuse for delay—if we should need one."

Tactful inquiries and detective work convinced Beach and Hayes that Marion had suffered from nightmare. Life aboard the Karluk did not deviate at all from the dull routine of any small freighter. In the

morning light Marion herself was inclined to doubt events of the night before.

"I suppose I'll be seeing pink elephants and goldfish wearing high silk hats, next!" She smiled wanly. "The coffee they make on this boat is bad enough, but I never dreamed it would do that to me!"

Late in the day with better weather they made out the distant bulk of Kodiak Island. Captain Blye was right. He accepted their congratulations with a bark. "Ain't no damn fool!"

During the following day they rounded Kodiak at a respectful distance and came to anchor finally off a barren shore. "The village lies in that cove," Hayes exclaimed. "Set me ashore in a boat."

Blye was fussy.

"Don't need no pilot."

"I think we do," Hayes insisted. "He knows the place well—and it's not a healthy place if you don't know it."

"Don't trust any Eskimos!"

"They're not Eskimos. Aleuts, Indians. I know this man, captain, and I advise you he may be very useful."

"I'll go with you, then. Ain't goin' to take no pilot unless I see him. Responsible for this ship."

Hayes acquiesced readily.

Beach drew the Alaskan aside. "You really want this Indian?"

"Paul Oo-kat-lek is a good man. A friend of mine. We can use him. I hope he has some friends to bring along!"

But at the Aleut village disappointment waited. A few women were left in the skin houses. The men were hunting and might be gone for weeks. Blye listened suspiciously while Hayes talked with the squaws in the clicking, spitting, guttural tongue.

"What she say?" he inquired incessantly. When Hayes told him finally that the needed man was not available the captain grunted. "Glad of it. Damn Indians! Fish eaters!"

They were rowed aboard the Karluk. "Now where?" Captain Blye wanted to know.

"I'll show you," Hayes agreed. "Come up to the chart house."

For two days the Karluk steamed through lonely waters, on her port bow the

bleak Alaskan coast, its mountain peaks a solid blue silhouette except where snow patches clung in ragged pattern. The weather relented and the sun favored them with a watery pallid light, but little warmth. It still circled below the zenith, and days still were short. Calmer waters became a slaty, cold blue. Nothing moved on their wide expanse. No sign of life could be seen on the coast. The world they were in had beauty, the majesty of great vistas and rugged picturesqueness, but no human touch, no human warmth. Marion, most susceptible to it, shivered often as she watched from the deck. They were so alone here, so utterly lost in this raw wilderness!

Hayes looked on the land with eyes alight. It was home again, for him. Beach was grave, but with a certain alertness, a sense of relief that their business soon would be done. But every hour increased Marion's dread. If only the ship were wrecked, if some accident only could turn them back! Of all things she dreaded most their shadowy destination, the bay of the glacier where Hayes's fortune lay. She knew that there would be written a chapter of her life she never could erase—a chapter of tragedy. There, Hayes must be told!

"Pretty nearly there!"

Beach had stopped beside her. He was smiling. "There's a thrill in this, isn't there? I used to dream about treasure-hunting when I was a youngster. Laughed at it when I grew older. But you can't deny there's a real kick in it!"

"We are—almost there—really?"

"Look, we're cutting in toward shore now!"

The Karluk's course had changed. She was approaching the coast. A peak, higher than its neighbors, and crowned with a majestic diadem of white, rose directly ahead of the bows.

Beach pointed. "Under that mountain is a long inlet—a fjord. In there lies this glacier, Hayes says. In just a few hours we'll see it. We'll know. To-day we may even see those pelts!"

Marion looked, but the landscape wavered before her eyes. "I—somehow, I can't believe it!"

"I know, I know!" Her hand was on the rail and Beach's covered it. He was smiling gently and pressed close beside her. "It's the end of a long trail, isn't it, my dear? A hard trail. But you did a splendid thing for Hayes—"

"I did!" Her voice cracked. She drew away from him, facing him with eyes that were black and hard. "I did a splendid thing—for—Hayes! Beach—you are—quaint!" She laughed unsteadily.

"Why not? You put the chap on his feet. You've made it possible for him to hold up his head again. What's the matter?"

She shrugged with better self control. "Nothing. Nothing's the matter."

He caught her sleeve and pulled her closer, gently. "It's been a pretty tough trail for me, too. Do you realize that? Do you, Marion?"

"I—yes, I suppose it has—"

"But I've tried to carry on—"

"You have carried on! You've done wonders!"

"Because of you, then. Because I had something waiting for me at the end of the trail. I've kept my share of the bargain, Marion."

"Yes."

"Well, thank Heaven, you're no welsher. You won't go back on your promise."

"No. I keep my promises."

"But you want to keep that promise? Say you do! You care for me, don't you? Marion, just one small payment in advance!" He bent near to kiss her.

She drew away, struggling. "Not here. Not now. Please, Beach! Later—I'll pay up!"

Beach laughed. "It's all right. I can wait. Look what I have to wait for!" He walked away smiling, humming cheerfully a silly little song from a new musical show.

Marion watched him go, experiencing odd emotions. This was the same Beach she had known for several years—yet a stranger. A total stranger! She realized with astonishment that she was afraid of Beach—afraid of this man she had bargained to marry! Beach was a stranger, unknown, a cause of mistrust and terror!

There was a stir of interest throughout

the Karluk. News that the voyage was nearing its objective seemed to radiate by intuition. Several unkempt heads were thrust from ports below. A couple of coal-grimed men appeared in light of day and stared at the land and pointed. On the bridge Hayes and Beach and Blye stood together watching the coast. Their progress was slowed to a more cautious speed.

The feeling was infectious. Marion forgot everything else to share this excitement of discovery.

With the steamer's approach new hills and headlands seemed to swim toward them—to materialize and take new importance. The snow-capped peak overtopped everything, spread across the sky and rose toward the zenith until closer ridges eclipsed it.

The Karluk passed into a channel that began to narrow, a channel bordered by steep hills forested with black-green spruce and pine and fir, so steep that they rose from the water's edge in cliffs and ledges. Captain Blye had a small boat out, sounding the channel, and the Karluk drifted and crawled at a pace irritatingly slow.

The channel turned sharply. When they were around the bend Marion saw that it ended about a mile beyond this turn. At the end ramparts of ice gleamed in the late sunlight. It was the glacier, that immense, slow-moving river of ice that flowed forever from its source in the peak towering above to the sea. Where the ice met the water it made palisades and cliffs, colored with cold blues and greens, sometimes striking prismatic notes of fire from the glancing sun rays. As Marion looked there came from these cliffs a report like heavy artillery, and presently the widening circles of a great wave breaking the reflections of the still channel into fragments like some gigantic jig-saw picture puzzle.

"The glacier is sloughing," said Hayes's voice close by her. "It keeps that up day and night—forever and ever. Sounds like a battlefield. I've seen a piece as big as some of those New York skyscrapers split off—and the racket of it!"

Hayes loomed bigger, more alive than she had ever seen him. Excitement had tightened his mouth to a severe line and

brought queer lights to his eyes. In spite of his casual manner the man evidently was feeling intensely.

"Beach and I are going to be rowed in," he went on. "You'll come?"

"If I'm wanted—"

"Wanted!" Beach exclaimed, joining them. "Do you mean to say you could resist the curiosity to see if our fortune's still there—after coming all this way!"

Two men were assigned to one of the Karluk's boats, and they were rowed toward the glacier, while Captain Blye groped his way to an anchorage as close in as he dared bring the steamer. Their boat was no more than a frail egg shell, its passengers pigmies, as they neared the towering ice walls that closed the channel. They were silent with awe at the fantastic towers, minarets and palisades of pure ice, the vast caverns and cracks that traversed it.

Hayes, at the tiller, veered the boat sharply as they came nearer. "It's not healthy. Too close," he exclaimed. "No fun having several thousand tons of that stuff drop on us."

Even as he spoke they exclaimed at the spectacle of a vast, jagged block tipping and tottering and cleaving with that terrifying, explosive crash of big guns. A wave generated by the ice fall came rolling toward them and Hayes turned the craft toward it, ordering the oarsmen to steady her until it had lifted them and passed, leaving them tossing in the choppy cross seas. Blocks of ice, ranging from splinters to bergs, bowed and rocked sedately all about them.

They passed along the front of the glacier to the right side of the fjord as one faced the mountain. Hayes steered their boat into a small cove and they landed. The two men were left to wait. Marion, Beach and Hayes went inland, the Alaskan leading.

"The cave is just over this shoulder," Hayes explained. "There's a little spur of the glacier left in here, dead ice, a sort of eddy or backwater out of the stream. The cave itself is rock, blocked with this ice—you'll see."

Hayes's voice shook a little. Beach was panting, and Marion's hand, pressed to her

throat, gave silent notice of her distress. All of them were at a half trot and quite unaware of it.

They crossed the shoulder of rock, broke through low thickets of vine and bush and young alder, and Hayes, who plunged on ahead, was heard to shout: "All right! Marion—oh, Marion! We win!"

Marion ran and leaped down the slope, the pebbles rolling beneath her feet. Beach had shouted something and crashed on. When she came up the men were standing before a low, dark passage, the hole of the cave, peering, exclaiming, shaken with excitement.

But Marion's interest was not for the cave nor for the piled bundles of seal pelts stowed in its dusk, though Beach and Hayes were pointing and shouting to her to see. Her first glance and all her glances were at the face of Jonathan Hayes. The victory was his, and the pride and delight that glowed in his plain, usually sober face, the triumph sparkling in his dark eyes, all of it reflected its warm glow upon her.

Just for that look on Hayes's face, just for the man's pride in achievement she had planned and worked, risked and traded, and endured with patience these last few weeks. She thought at that moment that all she had done was not too much to pay, to see Hayes's face.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAY OF RECKONING.

THE business took longer than any of them expected.

Captain Blye gave them his available men, and the seal pelts were carried from the cave across the shoulder of hill to the beach. There the bundles were opened and inspected by Hayes. Many skins had been damaged with age and the incomplete curing. These had to be weeded out, the bundles made up again and freighted to the Karluk lying some distance out in safe anchorage. Everybody worked at it, even Marion, who kept tally of the pelts. Toward afternoon of the third day, since anchoring the Karluk, the anxiety was past. They knew that Hayes's fortune was as-

sured—not fabulous riches, but, allowing for vagaries of the market price and usual accidents of carriage and trade, enough to let him repay Beach a good profit and leave himself comfortable.

A few pelts remained on the beach, enough for a last boat load. The boat would be coming soon for them. That would mark the end of their stay, the end of the chapter for Marion. After that there could be no more evading the issue. Jonathan Hayes had to be told the truth.

She had fallen back on the childish expedient of closing her eyes to the moment, of pretending the thing did not exist. Even now, sitting on a rock in the pallid sunlight she was thinking: "This thing isn't—not really! I'm not here, on a rock, somewhere in a wilderness. That glacier, the sea, the steamer, it's all a dream. I'm really home, in the studio. Perhaps I ate welsh rabbit last night—or is it too much smoking, I wonder!"

A step on the gravel behind her, a hand touching her shoulder gently, then Beach sat beside her on the rock. She thought Beach had gone back to the cave with Hayes. She didn't want to see Beach. She shrank from him uneasily.

Beach did not notice the shrinking. He was cheerful, had been cheerful, irritatingly cheerful these last days. He had paid no attention to her avoidance of him.

"Well, it's done. This is the last."

Marion made no answer, and Beach went on: "Yep. Glad of it, too. Somehow all this recent good luck—well, it's made me uneasy. Seemed too good to be true—after the other. I've jumped every time I heard a man cough. But we put it over. We sure did put it over! Are you glad, Marion?"

"Of course I am!"

"Yes. Yes, you ought to be. But you don't look it—"

"Stuff! I can't go round grinning all the time!"

"Hayes is glad, all right. The man looks ten years younger this afternoon. Ten? Twenty, I'll say. It certainly has been the making of him, poor old chap—"

"What do you mean, *poor old chap*?"

"Oh, nothing—I don't know! I like the

fellow—and, of course, I feel rather sorry for him—about you, you know. Have you told him yet? Told him about us?"

She shook her head.

"Better do it. Really, you had better. And—Marion, you know I'm waiting for something—"

"Waiting for what?" Her voice sounded flat and strained.

"I've waited a long time for it, too long. It's this!" Beach caught her to him and kissed her. He kissed her savagely, hungrily, and she could not move in his close grasp. She had to submit. He began hurriedly, greatly shaken: "You're going to love me, Marion. You can't help but do it! If you knew how patiently I've waited, how I've had to fight to keep cool and play the game as you wanted it played! But that's over. Thank God it is over! We needn't pretend now."

At last he let her go, and she drew away. Her hand went to her lips, wiping them. It was as though his kiss had soiled her.

"No!" Beach was repeating. "We're done with show acting. What do you say we get married in Seattle—or for that matter, Blye! You know the captain of a ship can marry people!"

Marion gasped. Beach leaped at this new idea, plainly delighted with it. "Marion! Come on, are you game for that?"

She began to speak hurriedly, shakily, scarcely conscious at first of her intention. Fear of Beach—fear of his kisses, fear of a future with this man drove her to say it. "Beach! Listen to me, please. You've always been a good sport, Beach. You play fair, don't you? Yes! Everybody knows that. If I should say that I can't marry you—that I can never marry you, you'd believe me? Would you believe me?"

Beach stared. "No, I wouldn't. There isn't any reason in the world why you can't marry me. No reason—"

"There is! There's a reason—the best reason—"

"What reason?" Beach's face had passed from bewilderment to stubbornness that promised trouble. "What reason?" he demanded in a tone that denied the reason before she gave it.

"Beach, I—I don't care for you—that

way. I can never care for you—that way. That's a reason, isn't it? Isn't that a good reason? Isn't it?"

"You don't mean that. You don't know what you're talking about. You do care—or you'll learn to care—"

"But I say I can't care. Not in a million years. Do you insist on it when I don't love you—can't ever love you?"

Beach rose from the rock and faced her, his gray eyes unfriendly, cold. "You're talking utter, damn rot," he said bluntly. "I won't try to discuss love with you—or what you can do or can't do. I'm no heart-throb expert to advise silly girls—and I know very well you're not the kind of silly girl that wants that advice. I do know that I care very passionately for you—and very tenderly. Marrying you means more than anything else to me. That's why I risked this trip—money, effort, dangers and all—because of you and your promise. We made a bargain. Now you're going to keep that bargain. Don't try to beg off!"

Marion rose. "I made the bargain," she said with sad dignity. "I'll keep it—if you insist."

Beach's arms went about her shoulders. "You do love me!" he cried. "You know you do. You'll find out—I'll teach you!" In vain she tried to avoid his lips, a sick loathing in her that made her knees tremble. His kiss gave her a frantic strength that thrust him back and left her gasping.

"Beach! That will do!"

Hayes had come down the hill and stood close beside them now, his look dangerous. Hayes's fists were doubled and he had difficulty keeping his tone even. "She doesn't like that, Beach. I wouldn't try it again if I were you."

Beach faced the Alaskan without giving a step. He was white and ready for blows. "Suppose you keep out of this!" he said. "I'll not keep out! I'll stay right here—"

"But if the lady asks you?"

"Asks me! Marion!" Hayes turned on the girl. She shrank from his look, seeming smaller, more frightened than ever. "It's all right," Hayes said to her more gently. "Beach will apologize for annoying you—and it won't happen again."

Marion's lips opened to speak, but no sound came. She gestured helplessly.

"Marion," Beach said quietly, "I think we had better tell Mr. Hayes all about it. Shall I tell him?"

Marion exclaimed hurriedly: "No, no, please. I—I'll tell him!" In a moment more the two men would have been at each other's throats. Beach, she knew, was armed. And his look showed he would not stop short of killing. "Hayes—listen please. I—Beach and I—are going to be married—in Seattle."

Hayes made no sound or movement, but seemed to freeze as he stood.

"Yes, we're going to be married. I have promised," Marion said. She achieved a ghastly smile. "We're waiting for your congratulations, Hayes."

Hayes said thickly: "You promised to marry Beach? When?"

"Oh, some time ago. Several weeks ago, wasn't it Beach?" Her desperation gave her better composure. She had to act now, to pretend if she was to prevent tragedy. She pretended splendidly. "Yes, just before we left New York. But we thought we'd keep it quiet, you know. It's a fine thing for me, Hayes. I wish you'd appreciate that. *Mrs. Irving Beach!* Think of that! And we're going to have a regular house on Fifth Avenue, butlers and chauffeurs and a lot of big cars and—and everything! Maybe if you're very polite, you can come see us. My dear! If you knew the field I was running against. All the gals had an eye on Irving Beach, and I got him for my very own. For Heaven's sake, are you going to stand there like a wooden image or are you going to tell me you're glad for me—"

"Stop that chatter!" Hayes cried. "You say you're going to marry this man?"

"You heard me say it—"

"Why?"

"Just what do you mean by that? Why? Because I choose to, that's why—"

"Because you—love—him?"

"Love him? Of course I do!" Marion's indignation was superb. She went to Beach and her arms went about his neck. She looked up into his face and smiled fondly. "I'm marrying him because he's

a dear, old sweetheart—and the girl isn't living that can resist him!" Deliberately she kissed Beach, clinging to him. From his arms she smiled at Hayes with every evidence of pride and happiness.

Beach, holding her fast, laughed briefly. "Well, Hayes, satisfied?"

"I see," Hayes murmured stupidly. "Yes—I see!" He started forward with an effort. "I'm very sorry—that I—misunderstood. You'll excuse my bad manners."

"Of course!" Beach extended his hand.

"You must be friends!" Marion exclaimed. "I don't want you, boys, to quarrel like that again—ever! Wish me luck, Hayes!"

Hayes, towering above her, repeated gravely as if he had memorized a lesson: "I wish you both every possible good fortune—and happiness—together—"

Suddenly he turned his back on them. His stumbling movement told them the man was beaten down. All that was vital in him had been killed.

Hayes sat down on a rock at a little distance, his back toward them still. Her heart ached for him with a bitter, throbbing hurt— And then Beach clasped her and kissed her again. She bit her lips to keep back a scream.

But for all her effort she cried out at Beach's embrace—a sharp, broken cry of protest that roused Hayes.

What happened immediately, though, put all thought of the girl in the background for the time.

The boat from the Karluk was landing. A half dozen men were leaping out of it. All of them carried rifles. More astonishing still was the broad shouldered, sturdy, red-bearded man who led them all and greeted the astounded looks of the trio in the cove with a wide, thin-lipped grin. The man was Captain Darius Cook.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THINGS MADE PLAIN.

DARIUS COOK'S behavior was almost as startling as his appearance in this lonely little cove of the bay of glaciers. On the three astounded onlook-

ers he bestowed scarcely a glance at first. His mild voice broke into brisk orders.

"Two of you boys keep your guns on those folks. The rest of you pitch into those pelts and hustle 'em. That's the last of the lot, and we want to get out of here ahead of dark. Now, boys!"

The captain supervised the moving of the seal pelts, his back to the trio as if they did not exist at all. But two sailors with rifles kept them trained on Hayes and Beach and the girl, and though they, too, were grinning at the joke, they meant business.

Hayes found his voice first.

"Cook!" he shouted.

"My dear chap, in just a minute!"

Cook glanced at them, and turned again to give final directions. Then he walked toward the three, walking deliberately, daintily, careful to avoid soiling his polished shoes. Cook was dapper as always, dressed in his neat blue serge, the customary silk shirt with a soft collar, the chaste and elegant tie, the gold sleeve links, a becoming soft hat covering his bald head. To Marion he removed the hat and made a little bow.

"Dear lady, we meet again—at last! Gracious, what a time it seems since that morning on Kalvik Island! But you're charming as ever. Youth is so splendid!"

"Look here," Beach said curtly, "what the devil does this mean?"

Cook grinned a little. "Mr. Irving Beach, of New York, I take it? We have never met, but of course I know you by reputation—"

"Just forget the play acting," Beach cut in. "Come down to cases. What are you doing here?"

"Why," Cook exclaimed, "didn't you know? Can't you guess? I am your fellow passenger—on the Karluk."

"It was he!" Marion gasped. "I did hear his voice that night!"

Cook looked slightly put out. "You heard my voice? On the Karluk? Dear me—I had no idea I had been so careless. Ah, I know now, the night you gentlemen called on Captain Blye—and almost surprised me. Of course. You managed to search the cabin quite cleverly, really!

But, you see, I had slipped out. We had a panel cut through the wall just behind the captain's berth. It made a convenient door to my own little quarters, which, naturally, had to be kept a secret. Dear, dear, how nearly we came to being found out!"

Beach and Hayes exchanged startled glances. Cook's words made it plain that this plot had been well thought out and well carried out; that its beginning dated back to their own start.

"Good Lord!" Beach gasped. "How long has this thing been going on?"

Cook gloried in explanations. "Since you left New York, my dear fellow. Oh, yes, before that, even. You Easterners never seem to give us proper credit for intelligence, Beach. Why, I began my work as soon as you made it possible to take this trip. I had my backer as well as Hayes—a man fairly well known to both of you—ready to match dollar for dollar with you when it comes to getting these pelts—"

Marion interrupted with a cry: "That man is Douglas Fox! I know it!"

Cook bowed again. "A woman's intuition is almost uncanny," he applauded.

"You spied on us and tagged along, did you?" Beach burst out indignantly.

Cook laughed. "You might put it that way. And, Beach, as a business man, you must admit it was a shrewd stroke coming on the Karluk. Fox was ready to charter a ship, to go to any amount of trouble to follow you up and take the pelts away from you. But I, in my crude way, am a student of efficiency. I pointed out to him how unnecessary it was to go to the expense of two vessels when one was all that was needed. Our only real difficulty was in getting you to take the Karluk. It was there that the planning came in. Yes, and I must give credit to Al Sapley—"

"Sapley!" Hayes exclaimed.

"I told you that little rat would double-cross his own mother if there was a dollar in it for him," Marion said bitterly.

Hayes considered the revelation in stunned silence.

Cook went on. "Yes, Sapley did good work. He managed the cancellation of

your first charter and kept you from getting that other boat in Seattle. By that time we had made all necessary arrangements on the Karluk, and my good friend Blye came to you with his splendid offer." Cook laughed silently. "If there are any other questions I'll be glad to answer them. I'm crude, I know. I lack the advantages of Mr. Beach with his wealth and business ability. But in my humble way I want you to understand I'm capable of taking a trick now and then."

The three prisoners were silent. Under Cook's genial manner they detected signs of a purpose that meant them no good. Cook was planning active deviltry and gloating over the revelation he was holding back.

Hayes burst out roughly: "You damn scoundrel! You dog! You mean to murder us. Murder—that's your plan!"

Cook rolled his eyes. "Hayes!" he expostulated. "My dear, good chap, you shock me!"

"Look here," Beach cried, "just what do you mean to do? Let's hear the rest of your clever plans. We admit you did very well and very cleverly. Well?"

Cook said mildly: "I mean to take the seal pelts, of course. I've wanted them these last couple of years, since I first heard of them. Now that they're safely aboard the Karluk at last, there isn't very much more to do, is there? We'll say good-by and get under way—"

"Leave us here?" Beach cried.

Cook shrugged. "I'm afraid I'll have to do that. What else can I do? Look at it from my point of view, Beach. It would be most embarrassing to take you along—in fact, I couldn't think of it."

"Murder us in cold blood, would you?"

"Oh, not murder—"

"You know it's murder," Hayes interrupted sternly. "It's murder as certainly as if you order these men to shoot us down. Murder and torture—the torture of slow starvation, cold, exposure. And you condemn a woman to that!"

"My dear Hayes! I've heard you boast you grew up among the Aleuts. Surely you can manage to live off the country. Eventually you ought to be able to find some

settlement—though I'll admit that may take you several months."

"Listen to me," Hayes said. "I call this murder, and you know it is. I can live off the country, yes. These two can't. A frail woman—and this man, a man who's never been off a yacht or outside a millionaire's shooting camp. If you were a man you'd kill them in cold blood and be done with it."

Cook shrugged. "It's the best I can offer. No use arguing that."

Hayes seemed on the point of doing something desperate. His wild eye and twitching lip showed a man tried beyond human endurance. The armed men pressed forward their rifles apprehensively. But Hayes conquered himself by an effort, and grew calmer.

"Listen to me," said Hayes. "You can do better than that. I sha'n't appeal for any mercy from you; there is no mercy in you. But I can show a plan much better—and much safer for you. I'm surprised at you, Cook! You're crude, after all! Clumsy! You mean to sail away from here with a cargo of pelts to which you have no title—stolen goods. Not only that—you propose to saddle yourself with the chances of apprehension for our murder! Do you call it clever to stack the cards against yourself that way?"

"I'm open to reason," Cook said curtly. "Show me a better plan."

"By right of discovery these pelts are mine," said Hayes. "Suppose I gave you a bill of sale for them? That would make them yours, and no questions asked when you sold them?"

Cook nodded. "That would clear up a minor difficulty. Go on."

"Give this man and woman safe passage to Kodiak Island. Give me your promise before these men of yours you will do this thing, and I will give you that title to every seal pelt in the lot. Is it a bargain?"

"And you?"

"I'll take my chances here. By myself."

Beach gasped. "You wouldn't do that!"

"I certainly will," Hayes spoke with cool confidence. "I'm not afraid to take that chance. I know the land—"

Marion turned on him suddenly, her hands on his arm. "But, Hayes! The sealskins—they're yours—you wouldn't give them up—"

"The sealskins! What a little thing to give up!"

"No. You must not give them up. A little thing? They mean your good name. Remember what depends on your producing them. And now that you've won, you sha'n't give that up. You sha'n't!"

Hayes smiled a little in spite of his desperate purpose. "It strikes me I haven't much to say about that—except to make it a little easier for Cook to get rid of them. And I shall give them up if I can make that bargain. Cook, how about it?"

Cook said finally: "If Beach and Miss Reade will sign a pledge to keep absolute silence about this business—"

"They'll sign that pledge," Hayes agreed.

But Marion cried out: "No, no, Hayes! Never to tell—never to defend your name when you're called a swindler and worse? When everybody will say you lied about your treasure!"

"You will sign that pledge," Hayes dictated sternly. "Let them say what they please. It's nothing to me—nothing. Do you think I mind losing that when I've lost—you? I'll give you all that—for a wedding present."

"It seems the only way, Marion," Beach seconded. "Hayes stands a chance here. You don't. I'm afraid I wouldn't be much help, either. And you can't go alone—with this fellow. Yes, we'll sign, Cook."

"Very well," Cook agreed. "On that consideration I'll give you both passage—not to Kodiak Island—I can't take any chances even with your promise—but to a safe port. Just as quickly as I can get the pelts sold you two can go about your own business. Please get into that boat. We must hurry."

Hayes wrote a bill of sale on a leaf of his notebook and gave it to Cook. Beach turned to Hayes and thrust out his hand, Hayes taking it silently. Half hysterically Marion would have clung to the Alaskan. She was at a loss for words. Her eyes filled and she began to cry incoherently.

"Good-by," Hayes said gently. And then to Beach: "Take her. Don't waste time."

Beach led Marion to the boat. Cook and his men went with them, but the captain posted one man to make sure that Hayes did not stir.

The men shoved the boat afloat. All got in, and the oars were out. Hayes stood where they had left him, like a man of stone. His strong hands dangled lifeless at his sides. His head was bent and his gray eyes looked up from under heavy brows, looking his last on the woman he loved, who had taught him much and had raised high hopes only to smash them down.

Marion, staring back at him, had that scene burned indelibly in memory—the little cove strewn with boulders, the bit of beach, the black growth of forest behind, and the giant figure of a man who stood so still, so passive, giving up everything that she might go safely. Something within her was ready to break with grief, with protest at the horror of this sacrifice for her.

Cook's voice spoke suavely: "Good-by, dear, old chap. Give my love to the Aleuts if you ever see them again."

Then that something in Marion's breast snapped. She sprang to her feet and had leaped from the boat before a hand could touch her.

She splashed through the shallow water and was running toward Hayes, crying passionately: "Hayes! Hayes! I won't leave you. I'll never leave you! I lied, Hayes! I love you—only you! I'll never leave you again!"

At Marion's words Hayes came to life with a start. He charged toward the boat. Whether he meant only to meet the girl, or meant to take vengeance on Cook, was not plain. But to Cook, his nerves already at the breaking point, ready to explode into a frenzy, it was plain Hayes meant mischief. Cook was on his feet, taking deliberate aim.

As Marion glanced over her shoulder she saw the captain's intention, and blocked his line of fire.

In the boat Beach and Cook grappled. The pistol cracked once, and Beach reeled

back. Cook aimed again, a deliberate shot that found Beach's heart. The sportsman toppled out of the boat, half in the water, half on the sand, dead.

Marion ran up the sand. Cook turned from his murder, leaped ashore, and was after her, gun waving, when Hayes found his own weapon, and checked the crazed captain with a well-placed shot. Hayes dashed across the rocks, seized Marion in his arms, and dragged her hurriedly behind a big boulder. Crouching there, he turned his fire on the men in the boat.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN OUNCE OF CAUTION.

FOR a few minutes, while Hayes's scattering shots raked the beach and forced the men in the Karluk's boat to cower under the gunwale, the Alaskan ruled events in the cove. From behind the sheltering boulder Hayes could not see Cook. When the bullet caught him in the arm the captain spun on his heel and dropped. Hayes did not know whether he had killed or maimed his man. He hoped that he had killed him.

Besides Cook five men had come ashore from the Karluk. All had rifles. Hayes's first shots sent them to cover, and Cook's fall deprived them of leadership. One or two stray shots were sent after the Alaskan, but the men had no particular interest in the fight. Several were working with desperate caution to get the boat off the beach. A shout from Cook stopped that. Responding to his orders, the five left the boat and deployed, running in various directions for the cover of rocks and logs.

Hayes with one pistol could do no more than pump a few shots in their general locality in the hope of a lucky hit. Once these men were separated he knew very well his chances dwindled. They could come at him from six different ways if they chose, cut him off, kill him at leisure. And when they killed him, what of Marion? Answering the scattering fire, Hayes turned to study the land behind him. The boulder under which Marion and he lay was backed up against the shoulder of hill. The hill

rose steeply, an earthen bank, slippery with mud and for a space of fifty feet without cover of even a shrub. But behind that lay the scrub timber. There was no other avenue of retreat; if they were to use this it must be done at once.

"There's just a bare chance to get out of this. Will you risk it?" he asked Marion.

Her eyes met his, unafraid. "I'll go where you go."

"Up that bank, then. It's slippery. They may get us. But take the pistol. If I'm hit you can use it—as you see fit."

"Cook won't touch me alive," the girl said soberly. Then for just a moment her face became piteous. "Hayes, I don't want to die! I love you!"

Hayes stooped swiftly and kissed her, briefly, passionately. "If it has to be, die fighting!" he whispered. "You're not afraid now!"

"No, I'm not afraid."

Hayes rose, and Marion followed him. They sprang at the slippery bank and began to climb, using hands and feet at the task.

For a moment they were not observed. Then the bullets began to *sput-sput* in the mud about them. With a shout five men were up from cover and after them. The exception was Cook. He stood still, taking more careful aim.

It was a nightmare task to climb that slippery bank. The bullets sang about them. Their feet found holes that crumbled and left them floundering. Marion, thus betrayed, was slipping back. Hayes reached down cautiously, grasped Marion's hand, and drew her up.

The five pursuers finally heeded Cook's orders. All stopped and began a deliberate fire. Several bullets went through the loose folds of Hayes's coat. Another seared the flesh of Marion's arm.

She looked up at Hayes and smiled. "We'll die—game—kid!"

The shooting had stopped. Hayes did not risk a second to find out why. In that lull he inched himself upward again, found firmer footing, and dragged the girl with him. They scrambled, then rolled over the

top of the bank, and found themselves in the shelter of thick brush.

Lying flat, they crawled deeper into the cover. At last from behind a log they ventured to peer down into the cove. Cook and his men were standing still, as if under a spell. They heard then, having time to hear and understand sounds ignored before, the hoarse bellow of the Karluk's whistle.

The whistle was sounding shorts blasts: one, two, three, four—one, two, three, four. In the frantic repetition the voice of steam and brass took on a character. It was shouting like some living thing, and its call was a cry of alarm, of urgent appeal. As they looked the six listening men were galvanized to activity. They ran for the boat and got it awash. They pushed out, and the oars dipped, raggedly, hurriedly, each stroke conflicting with the other. They could hear Cook's screamed order for rhythm.

Hayes leaped up suddenly.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "I know what it is. Come here. Look!"

He dragged Marion, breathless, to a spur of the rock. They stood out on it, unafraid. From this vantage they could see down the channel to where the Karluk lay at anchor, spurts of steam rising from her whistle. And beyond, around the bend of the channel, came another vessel—a white-painted vessel with a sharp bow and buff stack, a smart, warlike, deadly efficient craft that ripped the quiet water of the fjord.

"The Bear!" Hayes shouted exultantly. "The revenue cutter Bear. They got my message!"

"Got your message?" Marion gasped. "What message?"

Hayes was smiling grimly, his dark eyes alight. "This is Cook's finish. He can't wriggle out now! I've got him."

"What is it? What have you done?" Marion was crying, shaking him frantically in her impatience.

"When we touched at Kodiak Island I sent word. I had the Indian woman take word across the island for me. I asked for the cutter—told them where to find us. It was just a wild guess—a precaution. Your fright on the Karluk that night

prompted it. It kept me worrying, worrying for fear Cook might come—that he might fool us in some way. So I sent for the cutter. It's the ounce of precaution that saved us. Look—look at the men in that boat! They won't try for the Karluk now. They'll try to land—to get into the woods!"

From their height they could see the drama in detail.

The Karluk's boat had swung off its path toward the steamer. Now it was headed straight across the inlet toward the farther shore, its plain purpose to escape the revenue men.

Cook was steering. They could see his bald head plainly, even the peculiar, wounded awkwardness of his helpless left arm. He had swung the small boat in toward the glacier and was skirting the front of the ice ramparts.

"God!" Hayes gasped. "I believe they will make that shore! But I'd hate to be under that ice!"

Always the glacier was showering its fragments. Always there was the danger from some huge block splitting away and toppling into the sea. The man and woman on the rock, clinging tight to each other in their excitement, watched the small boat crawl along under the menacing palisade and forgot to breathe. The air about them shook with a sharp explosion. The cutter had fired a gun, directing a shot across the bows of the Karluk's boat, a signal to turn back.

Then the watchers saw something that killed their mutual cry of alarm before it was spoken, constricting their throats, depriving them of all volition. They could only watch, terrified.

When the echoing reverberation of the signal gun died they heard first the rattle of small ice blocks, the fall of loose trash along that half-mile rampart, dislodged by the concussion. But after that fall came the preliminary groan and crackle of fissures spreading like jagged lightning through a solid block of the glacier wall. The eye could actually see the darting lines of cleavage as they spread through the translucent green and blue that sparkled so prettily in the late sunshine.

Nature's mechanism worked with a deadly efficiency and precision that was awful to watch.

The men in the Karluk's boat had ample warning of their fate. They could be seen pulling frantic strokes to get their craft from under the breaking rampart. The horrified watchers on the rock saw the detail of it all, groaning aloud when one oar snapped under a madman's strain and the oarsman tumbled among his fellows.

The preliminary creaking and cracking of the ice burst into a great crescendo of sound, a terrifying, earth-shaking boom that stunned the ears.

A vast, ragged block of ice, fully fifty feet high and as thick through and wide, a towering berg, fairly leaped from the mother wall and loomed above the pigmy boat, rocking in an arc farther and farther off balance until it fell and all sign of man was blotted from the picture.

Of all that had happened in that last crowded hour there remained but one visible sign—the body of Beach sprawled on the sand of the cove.

The Karluk was bound south.

Captain Blye no longer commanded the steamer. The revenue department had assigned a competent young lieutenant to take her to Seattle and land Hayes and his treasure safely.

Blye had gone aboard the cutter Bear, a prisoner, to stand trial before a Federal commissioner. The captain had but one observation to make on the events of the voyage. As he was being taken off the Karluk he observed to Hayes with his usual economy of words: "Cook was a damn fool; so'm I."

Hayes and Marion watched him off in the cutter's small boat. His head was sunk, chin on chest. A soft felt hat was pulled over his eyes. His arms were folded. He looked the very picture of a second-rate Napoleon going to his Elba.

On a fine, clear night Hayes and Marion stood at the Karluk's stern, watching the eerie fairy fireworks of the aurora. Jagged spears of light, like the lances of a massed battery of searchlights, wheeled and clashed, climbing as high as the zenith and

falling back again. Pulses of rose and violet and amber and green and blue throbbed and wavered.

The mysterious activity, its unceasing change and unfailing beauty, held them quiet a long time. Marion sighed finally:

"And once I told you about the bright lights of Broadway! And I grinned to myself, thinking how they would awe you! Of all the unutterably silly, flatheaded ideas! Hayes, I'm just a plain, city fool!"

Hayes's arm tightened about her. He said nothing, but the caress of that arm comforted and reassured her that he didn't agree in her self-valuation.

"When we've sold the pelts," Marion went on earnestly, "when everything is settled, and we're married—will you take me back to Kalvik, Hayes? Will you teach me your country—and the things that are worth knowing?"

"But, my dear, you'd die of loneliness away from Broadway!"

"Broadway! Hayes, I'd die of suffoca-

tion there. That cheap, sham stuff. That hokum! You've taught me things. I'm beginning to understand there is something better and bigger than that. Things that civilization stifles. Don't take me back there, ever! It's rotten!"

Hayes shook his head slowly. "No, just partly rotten—and lots of it sound. For you've taught me, too—you've made me want the best that civilization has to offer. The big thing, as I see it, is not to let the bright lights and glitter fool you about Broadway—or my own country. The real gold doesn't advertise—you have to look for that. So we won't give up your civilization altogether."

Marion came closer into his arms.

"Maybe you're right—maybe, some day, I'll find I'm homesick for that stuff, after all—"

"Then you shall have it. We'll try to get the best out of all of it."

She sighed contentedly. "Whatever you say goes, old dear!"

(The end.)



Gay and Devilish

by Charles Augustine Logue

I AM trapped, doomed.

Downstairs, the cops are waiting—I must be excused if I refer to them as such instead of police, because since the awful affair with my friend the vampire, I am not as careful of my language as when

we were at high school. As I wrote, the cops are waiting for me and it will probably go hard with me, because, as luck would have it, I shall be eighteen years old tomorrow, which is legal age for a woman of the world such as I have become through

these terrible past few days. I am glad I have no father or mother to bear my disgrace, but as my name rings down through the pages of history, I wish that the truth may be known in this confession, though my lips are locked in the silence of a life sentence in some far-off jail.

I am writing this in an upper guest room of the Armitage mansion, through whose stately halls I was destined to reign as queen, had not fate intervened. I am dressed in the same clothes I have worn for several hours; namely, lingerie and a fur coat. I have appeared in public in this impossible costume, defying detection, but the end is in sight. There is a thousand-dollar value bank note in my pocket, which has been stolen and which I cannot restore; while over in the corner of the room reposes a long wooden box with the word "Mortician," which I have just discovered means a swagger undertaker, and contains a corpse, male or female, I cannot tell. But worse than all, I have spent the night in this room with a man who is not my husband and who will probably never be my husband, as the law is very strict when one party is in prison, or has any conviction against his or her record.

But I am not daunted—I am the captain of my soul, my head is bloody, but unbowed—this is a quotation from a famous poem; so you can see I have my senses about me, or I would not be able to remember little things of beauty. As I wrote, I am not daunted. I have been gay and devilish through it all and this will sustain me in the future.

As I write I can hear a knocking at my door, but I will not open it, unless they batter it down, as they do in stories, when the heroine is at bay. I owe it to myself to complete this confession, which will tell the world the truth about Fanchon Browne and why she is here at bay, locked in a guest room, with a mortician's box, a fur coat and lingerie and a bank note for a thousand dollars.

A few weeks ago I was but a little girl when these events began that have changed me into a woman of affairs. I believed in the serious side of a woman's duty to the world, I rejoiced in the thought of sacrifice.

I was living then with my guardian, Martin Nethercote, a stock broker, and his sister, whom I called my Aunt Bessie, an elderly spinster of thirty-two years of age. But it seems that even at thirty-two the fires of love have not died in a woman's heart. However, since I did not discover this until last night I will not speak of it until I come to it.

In my serious efforts to accomplish something to uphold woman's new advancement in the world I went in thoroughly for sculpture, and we had a studio fitted out in the house. There I modeled in clay, never taking heed of the slighting remarks I overheard, which were about my being a kid pest.

My chum and confidant, until I discovered her deception, was my friend Lilah Deane, a born vampire, of whom I was proud, because when we were in the park mornings she could attract men with a glance of her eye, and we laughed to see how she could stare coldly right through them when they attempted to talk to her. In those days I used to practice it myself, but I never could succeed in winking properly or wearing the right kind of green skin-tight clothes that vamps are born to endure. I have since found out that Lilah's name comes from Delilah of the Bible, who ruined Samson by vamping him in church. But, of course, we did not go that far. Lilah and I did put up our hair and run in on a few art receptions, just like older people, however, and that is probably what caused me the present trouble. Hereafter I will stay away from art receptions.

It must have been at one of these receptions that Peter Armitage, the bloated capitalist, saw me. Bloated capitalist is only a term and does not refer to him exactly, as I am in his home accepting his hospitality until the time of my arrest. But why didn't he pick on Lilah, who is looking for a rich match? It is fate!

We were in the studio one morning at work on a statue of Apollo, for which Mr. Slasher Bowles, a prizefighter, was posing for me and Lilah. His face is fine, but you have to do one side of it twice for a complete head, as the other side has an ear very thick from fighting and which he re-

fers to as cauliflower, though I cannot see the resemblance, and I am very fond of cauliflower. But Mr. Bowles was a fine model and very respectful and devoted to Lilah, who had him vamped from the first minute she saw him running in a big sweater in the park.

It was on this morning that Aunt Bessie came into the studio and ordered Mr. Bowles to put on more clothes, no matter how Apollo used to go about in Rome, and no matter about art, even if Mr. Bowles was wearing his regular fighting costume, which is not any more than the bathing girls wear in moving pictures. Every event of that morning is vivid, and so I write about them.

For it was on that morning that I encountered fate. Aunt Bessie had located Mr. Bowles's manager, who was looking for him to train, and she turned him over to the manager, a thick-set man who chewed a cigar and agreed that Mr. Bowles had a very fine head in tight places and could "stall" in his work, whatever that meant. And when they had gone Aunt Bessie took me out to the library, where I was surprised to see my guardian, Martin Nethercote, had returned from his office, although it was not yet noon time.

To make the matter short, my guardian confessed that my money was badly invested and that I would probably not get anything. This did not dismay me, because it was not much, anyway, and I was very fond of him. But then he told me that his business rival, Peter Armitage, was squeezing him in a corner on some motor car stock which he could not deliver, and that they had indulged in a talk that morning in which this Peter Armitage had suggested a way out of the difficulty.

It was me!

He had seen me a couple of times at art receptions when I had my hair up with Lilah and had fallen in love with me and wanted to marry me as a settlement of the shares in which my own money was invested, too, and was lost unless Mr. Armitage allowed my guardian to deliver them under the market price of the corner.

I was stunned, and Aunt Bessie began to cry.

My guardian accused her of shedding crocodile tears, and now I know what he meant, but I did not then, and I told her not to cry. There was no one in the world I loved and it did not matter. Mr. Armitage would probably die soon and I would be very rich. It was a sacrifice such as the heroic women of history have made before me. So I told my guardian that I would marry Peter Armitage to save him, and I prepared for the sacrifice.

Of course I let Lilah know at once, and she seemed delighted, as she wanted to be a bridesmaid, and never did it occur to her that my heart was as heavy as lead. I took her up to my room, where I had enshrined the images of those famous heroines of history who had sacrificed themselves for the sake of others. As we traveled about the room I pointed out to her the sad face of Mary Queen of Scots and the daring ride of Lady Godiva to save the city, though from the way some women dress nowadays I imagine you could find many Lady Godivas, but they would have to buy false hair on account of bobbing being so popular.

Well, everything went along splendidly, and I was so sad and mournful that once my guardian, who was looking at the famous women's pictures with me, got very sad, and threatened to break off relations with Peter Armitage and defy him. But Aunt Bessie spoke up and said I was a fake and probably tickled to death over the prospect of marrying a man who was too good for me. And I saw my guardian look at her queerly. Little did I dream the outcome. Besides, I was desirous of being alone to suffer in silence.

The next evening I was to meet the man who had chosen to hold me to a marriage ransom to redeem Uncle Martin's money. There was a small but select reception, for which I dressed carefully under my aunt's cold scrutiny. But after she had gone downstairs Lilah and I put our own plan into effect. If I was to be sacrificed I would do the thing properly.

So it happened, and not as some will say "out of sheer devilry," that I appeared on the grand staircase at exactly ten o'clock dressed in deep mourning with a perfectly dandy black veil edged in white ruching

and with my hands folded in prayer. At exactly the same moment the orchestra leader, who had been instructed by me, ceased playing a waltz and struck up Chopin's Funeral March, as befitted the occasion, although it did throw some of the dancers out of step when the music changed, and they all stopped to look at me descending the staircase. They crowded around me, but I swept through them like some sad queen of an older day going to sacrifice herself.

I marched straight to my guardian, who was talking to a fat, elderly man, and waiting to be presented I stood with hands meekly folded. My guardian asked me what I meant, only he used strong language after I explained, and offered to take the arm of the fat old man, who was not Mr. Peter Armitage after all. Some one ordered the music to stop and get back into a fox trot, and my guardian hurried me off, explaining that Mr. Armitage was unexpectedly called away. Before he had gone he had told Uncle Martin that he would have to go out of town and would like to see me up in the country at a very classy hotel, near his summer home, which he was going to open soon.

Of course I had to agree, particularly as my guardian said it would be better if we became acquainted in the midst of nature, where things might work out romantically for us. But that night I began to be afraid. I wanted to run away, even if it were only to the Hotel Envoy, which was the classy resort Mr. Armitage had selected to woo me in spite of myself.

So it happened that a day later I was registered at the Hotel Envoy and plunged in despair. My chum Lilah went along with me to aid in the hour of my sacrifice, as well as Aunt Bessie, who was very disagreeable and sarcastic over my coming down in mourning to meet my promised fiancé. She had all the air of the martyr in the case, while the rôle belonged to me.

It was Lilah who made the terrible discovery the following morning that Peter Armitage had arrived and was registered at the hotel. I confess I was in a panic. It first occurred to me that if I dressed in very plain clothes and acted like a per-

fect kid instead of grown up, which I was, that maybe Mr. Armitage would have pity on my youth and ignorance. And as Lilah and I were debating the matter the first box of flowers and candy from Peter Armitage arrived and it threw me into a panic. With Lilah's aid I got into some of my old clothes and did my hair up terrible and hastened out into the wilds of nature to commune alone. There was no sign of pursuit, and I was glad, for I must have looked a perfect fright, what with my get-up and the fact that I slipped on a bank near the river and got mud on my face.

I was leaning over the bank to see my reflection when an incident happened that changed the course of my whole life and brought me here in this trap, from which there seems no escape. As I gazed down into the water I saw a butterfly, or what I imagined to be such, come sailing from behind the bend and the next instant it was fastened in my hair. I tumbled into the water and was caught on the end of a fishing line held by a young and handsome man, who reeled me in like a giant trout, until he saw that it was a young lady and not a fish. The butterfly was his casting leader and I was the victim, in more senses than one.

At first I was angry and then I felt foolish, for the young man mistook me for one of the country girls and gave me a bag of candy and a twenty-five cent piece. It was such a good joke that I took it and had the sense to remember what Lilah had taught me about vamping. I gave him a sigh and a look, and there and then I began the gay and devilish career that has brought me to ruin.

Could I have but known what was in store for me! But I was lonely and very miserable over the thought of marrying old Peter Armitage, who was probably waiting at the hotel, and I determined to have one stolen moment of romance before all would end in wedlock. The stranger was not old in any sense of the word, being perhaps not more than twenty-two or three, but there was an indefinable air of mystery about him, as about men who have lived and achieved things. What a model he would have made for Apollo, instead of Slasher Bowles!

It was such a joyous moment for masquerade that I allowed our conversation to continue, though I acted like a perfect kid and made all sorts of intentional blunders, such as I wanted to practice in order to make Peter Armitage dislike me. The end of it was my promise to meet him there the following morning and go fishing, and I told a lie about living on a farm near by, so that I could find out where he lived, which was at the hotel. So I determined not to let him catch me at the hotel, in order to continue my pretense.

When I had got back to my room I told Lilah about the meeting, and perhaps it was my desperate plight that made my mind keen, but at any rate, I thought of a plan to be rid of Peter Armitage. I offered Lilah my amethyst lavalier that she always envied if she would take the job of vamping Peter Armitage off my hands. I never could see, anyhow, how he had picked on me at the art reception when Lilah and I did our hair up. I argued with Lilah that Peter Armitage probably meant to fall in love with her, anyhow.

This was a challenge to Lilah, who is just as vain about men as she is deceitful, as I have since found out. It took her only an instant to agree and to begin practicing around the room, which she was only able to stop in time or Aunt Bessie would have caught on.

So I kept hidden until I could get down to the stream to meet the stranger, and I gave Mr. Armitage's flowers to Lilah, who wore them. My second meeting was lovely, and I found the stranger fascinating. When I got back I could see that something was up, because Aunt Bessie was looking all over for me to present me with another huge bouquet, sent by Mr. Armitage, who was evidently preparing the way gently. But she gave me a piercing look when she discovered the old clothes and my altered looks.

Later I met Lilah and I was hungry for news, of which she had plenty and all of it treachery, which I found out later. She had met Mr. Armitage by dropping a flower and looking back over her shoulder in the way she has for captivating men. And she admitted that they were getting on very

well, and Mr. Armitage had not once asked about me. But when I asked if he was very old and ugly, she evaded me in a way I do not like.

And this went on for several days, my meeting the stranger and Lilah vamping Peter Armitage out of my life—or so I thought. Then I got the real shock. For one day I caught her vamping my own stranger and in a flash the truth was out.

The stranger was Peter Armitage!

Woman can avoid her duty just so long, but it will overtake her in the end, and when I saw that Peter Armitage was the stranger I realized that I was wrong in dodging my sacrifice. And after that decision I felt calmer, though I wondered why such a handsome man of affairs who had been able to trap my uncle into a stock deal was not man enough to come forward and claim me as his forfeit. Now I know, but it is too late!

Of course I told Lilah that the whole deal was off and that I would do my duty as my guardian demanded, though it might mean my unhappiness and woe. I offered her the lavalier and told her the job was through and she need not vamp Mr. Armitage any more. Then Lilah's true nature came out and I saw her as she truly is.

She laughed at me and refused my simple request, which no lady should refuse, as it was about a young man who wanted to marry me and I told her so in no few words. We had a quarrel in which she had the audacity to tell me that handsome and rich young men like Peter Armitage were the proper game for vampires like herself and she would keep right after him and probably beat me as easily as could be, because she knew more about men. And Aunt Bessie came in on the argument and nearly threw a fit, which she did later in a sneaky fashion, as I will write when I come to that part of the story. Suffice it to say that Aunt Bessie dashed out to see Mr. Armitage, and came back saying that he was not at the hotel or else he was keeping hidden. And I asked her if she knew him and she replied that she did, and it was none of my business how or when.

But I had no time to lose, and I dressed right away and found Peter Armitage in

the garden. He was amazed to see me and I enjoyed his evident admiration which was as great as any that Lilah could bring. I lost no time in getting to the subject, nor did I wear my black dress at the meeting. I told him that I was Miss Fanchon Browne and that he had probably talked with my guardian, Mr. Nethercote, and that there was no further need of delay.

"I am ready to marry you," I said, because he was stammering and seemed to have a hard time to propose to me. Then when I saw him back off, I grew fearful that he might not want me after my disgraceful episode of the gay and devilish kid clothes, so I begged him not to scorn me for the sake of my guardian's money which was involved. And all at once I saw him get afraid and run away from me. He ran very fast and entered the hotel, only to meet Lilah and start talking with her as I came up, slowly and with dignity. And I swept past him and her, and she was wearing my lavalier and vamping hard.

Then it all came out, after I told Aunt Bessie, for in the next few minutes the right Peter Armitage arrived at the hotel! How can I explain more than to say that the younger one was the nephew, who had no money in spite of his firm, determined chin, and was dependent on his Uncle Peter, the man who wanted to marry me.

And such a man! He was forty, if a day, and was getting fat, though he had certain pleasant lines about the mouth. But I did not like the way he looked at me, up and down, as if I were his property when we were introduced by my guardian, who came up on the train with him.

I suppose I must have acted foolish with the shock of it all, particularly when young Peter was brought up and introduced to me by his uncle, and I had to accept an introduction to him almost as if we were total strangers, while Lilah stood in the offing ready to seize him and carry him off under my helpless nose.

To make matters worse, I was introduced as the bride-to-be of this man of forty, whose hospitality I now enjoy, and whose may be the last decent bed I shall occupy for years, as they say there are only cots in prisons.

And then Aunt Bessie came up, but there was no need of introduction, for it was evident that she knew Peter Armitage, the elder, and if I am not mistaken there was something between them once in the older days; and this bears out what my uncle guardian said about Bessie's crocodile tears.

Just as soon as I could get hold of Lilah I kissed her and tried to make up with her and have her forget the past and the words we had said. And I offered her my garnet ring and gold pencil if she would only take on the job of vamping the right Peter Armitage, which after all was in the original bargain. But she was nasty with me and intimated that my spirits of sacrifice, which I had adopted a little earlier when I asked the nephew to marry me, was all pretense and that I was like other women, and all women who claim they are making sacrifices when they are getting what they want in life. Which goes to show that girls may be chums until a man enters the game and spoils it.

So there was nothing to do but to prepare to marry forty-year-old Peter Armitage while my heart was elsewhere. But I would not be won lightly, and it seems that love sharpens the mind, so I evolved a plan that was much better than when I thought I would act the kid and have Peter take pity on me. It all came to me in a flash. I had heard of "Old Husbands and Young Wives," and I had read of old flames in new lamps and I was not dismayed. If Peter Armitage wanted youth at forty he would have to go after it, and I laid my campaign very neatly, while pretending to fall in with my guardian's plans.

It may have been cruel and deceitful, but as the guests at the hotel commented, he had it coming to him. I can be a perfect little devil when I want to, so the first thing I did was to get Mr. Armitage in an argument about his strength and how he used to be captain of the track team in college, just as his nephew is now. And I praised him and said that he was just as speedy now, and looked very young and offered to run him a race, which he accepted, and I let him catch me when he was winded, just to keep up his courage. But he puffed like a horse and I hated him, be-

cause he was so proud that he was in great condition and not winded at all.

That began it, and from then on I never gave him a moment's rest, beginning at daylight with horseback riding, in which he complained he "lost leather," and taking him rowing until he ached, and then dancing him off his feet in the evening.

And when I told Aunt Bessie about his "losing leather," and asked what it meant, she screamed at me and said I would drive her mad. And just before the last dance I caught Mr. Armitage hiding behind some palms with Aunt Bessie, and he had his shoe off, but I made him dance the last dance and a couple of encores, because he was so light on his feet. And I have to record in this confession that I could have been justified in refusing to go on with the match then and there, because I am sure that Mr. Peter Armitage swore at me.

But I forgave him freely and went to look for his nephew with whom I had not been able to dance, because my vampire friend was monopolizing him, and I am sure he looked sad and sick at heart. And when I found him later and we sat out on the porch in the moonlight, I could hear him sigh and declare he was being disgraced because every one would call me his aunt after the marriage.

The following day Mr. Armitage spent in bed, due to a headache, so I was told, and I took a walk with the young man who was to be my nephew. There were no words of love between us, but he told me the story of his life, which was a sad one.

He also told me that while he had no money he knew a business deal just as well as his uncle, which I believed from the firm chin, which is a family trait of the Armitages, only in his uncle's case there were two or three chins, and it was hard to tell which was determined.

But this business deal interested me, for it seems that young Peter had heard of a piece of property which the railroad would have to buy if a certain deal went through, and he knew the deal was certain. All he would have to do was to get an option on the property for a thousand dollars and he could force the ones who represented the railroad to give him big money. But he

could not get a thousand, as his uncle gave him only pocket money.

And all that evening I thought of the option. How gladly would I have given the sum to him when I was his aunt and married to his uncle who did not trust him. He really deserved a chance, and it wrung my heart to think of him going through life without enough money to get married on, or anything. Not that he was thinking of marrying Lilah, for I asked him that question plainly, as I felt I could do now, seeing I was to be his aunt. Lilah really meant nothing in his life at all—just an interlude.

Well, the next day my promised husband was up and around and I took him canoeing after a hard set of tennis, and although some will say that I tried to kill him, I will write in this confession, which is sacred, that I never meant to tip the canoe at all, and that I was merely reaching for some water lilies. But when we were in the water I called on him to save me, and I will admit that he tried very hard, although I can swim. But I seemed to be helpless and he kept up with me for a while and then he let me go, or rather, he let go and went under, and his nephew was just in time to save both of us.

On the shore Aunt Bessie carried on something dreadful, and not proper, for after all, he was my fiancé, though the engagement had not yet been announced. She accused me of trying to kill him, and only my guardian's well-chosen words in which he accused her of jealousy seemed to calm her. And there was no need of an uproar, for Mr. Armitage was coming to very nicely and all the water was out of him by that time. When he sat up he remarked ruefully that he would either be dead or in as good condition as long ago on the track team, by the date of our marriage. But he seemed to lack ardor in his talks with me later.

Then came the fatal visit to his house and the temptation that was too strong. He had intended to open the house for the season with a dance, but he found that there was some medicine containing alcohol which he would have to get.

When I arrived there Mr. Armitage was bundled up suffering from a cold, and I nursed him as well as I could, though I

could not help feeling that Peter Armitage the younger was wasting his time with my deceitful friend Lilah, because I had seen them on the road as I came in. And furthermore, I was afraid of trouble, because Lilah's friend, the prizefighter, had come up to train near the hotel that very morning, and had acted quite in jealous fashion because Lilah had not written to him, which I think was a very great display of nerve on his part, unless there is something more serious between them, which I hope, for it will take a prizefighter to keep that vampire in her place, and it will be for her own good if she gets the prizefighter, Mr. Bowles, as Peter Armitage is too good to waste on her kind.

The fatal moment that I speak of occurred shortly afterward, when Aunt Bessie, who had come over to chaperon us, was getting some mustard from the butler and the library safe was open. It surged over me like a lightning flash, the way I get things, and which is called woman's intuition, that here was the chance to let young Peter Armitage make a man of himself. Also, I reasoned, it was my duty as his future aunt to help him. The money would soon be mine, anyway, by reason of being a wife, and what did a few days earlier matter?

I write this so that any proper-minded person will see that I acted logically when I took a thousand dollars from the safe and put it in my dress in the interest of helping a fine young man who was soon to be my nephew. That it has caused a hue and cry and detectives are coming to arrest me is due to the hatred in which I am now held by this same Uncle Armitage, and does not matter. My motives were logical and correct, and I am willing as always that I should be sacrificed if it will help anybody I like, whether it be my guardian or somebody else, even including Peter Armitage, who is now rich in his own right, but must never know that he profited by my sorrow.

Well, to continue, as you may have surmised, I met Peter and gave him the thousand dollars, saying it was from my own funds and that I wanted to lend it to him for the option. And as you may also have surmised, Peter got the option and it was

good; in fact, it was his uncle who was stung into paying more with the railroad people; so you can see that there was a storm when Uncle Armitage found out it was Peter who collected ten thousand dollars' profit and wouldn't tell him how.

Then came the hue and cry, for the theft from the safe had been discovered and the amount was nearly twenty thousand dollars. I was too frightened and too proud to admit my part in it, but I was determined to restore the original loan, which Peter had repaid me.

By this time detectives were all over the house questioning everybody, and even hanging about the hotel. But I had my own troubles, for Peter and I were in love, though we had never even kissed, and he wanted me to elope with him, but I told him he would always be a nephew to me and that he must never tell who gave him the money. I now had that thousand-dollar bill that I took and it was necessary to return it at once.

It seems things happen the worst just when you want a little bit of luck to help you. First, I was visited by the Armitage butler, who said he had seen me at the safe and would tell unless I gave him part of the twenty thousand dollars I stole. I finally convinced him that I had only taken a thousand, and he promised not to tell on me if I would come and put the money back that night, and that he would leave the French windows open for me. Little did I dream of the trap before me.

It was the day when Peter Armitage the elder was to give his reception in my honor, although I could see that he did not consider me in the same friendly light as before, and I have heard Aunt Bessie tell my guardian that he would back out of the match in a minute if he was not afraid of a breach of promise suit. And that I was a perfect devil! But Aunt Bessie was probably jealous, as my guardian suggested. And as for myself, I assured my guardian that I was deeply in love with my promised husband, and enjoyed seeing Aunt Bessie throw another fit, which is all I can call it, though it is not dignified and like me to say it.

As evening drew on and all things crowded in on me, I grew desperate. There was

my coming engagement to a man I despised; there was the hateful butler, whom I had promised to restore the money when he would give me the chance; there was Peter in his new racing car, in which Lilah would probably ride unless, as his aunt, I requested otherwise, and I am sure he would have obeyed my wishes. Now that I have spent the night in this room with him—but I am getting ahead of my story.

In the late afternoon there were rumors about the hotel that the reception at the Armitages' would be the wettest thing in years. This, I take it, referred to a violation of prohibition—looked on as a smart trick at these affairs. If that was the intention, then something went wrong, as you will see, and there was no pledging the engaged couple in champagne or anything else.

It was Lilah who did me the worst injury one woman can do another, just before dinner. I had returned from a ride with young Peter in which there was no possible harm, although he did ask me to elope, and I told him to wait. It seems Lilah overheard and took it to mean that I was going to elope with Peter that evening. Aunt Bessie stormed and raged, and while I was dressing in the bathroom, she betrayed me by taking away all my gowns, leaving me entirely in lingerie and helpless. She said it was for my own good and the honor of their word to Mr. Armitage, and that she might let me have my clothes later. Luckily the thousand-dollar bill was in my pocketbook.

So I was forced to sit twiddling my thumbs, unable to leave my room, while the evening wore on, and I sat wondering what would become of me. If Peter had arrived I would have eloped, although I have no right to burden a young man with a wife who will probably have to do her loving through iron bars.

At length I got a brilliant idea—my long fur coat, which I had taken because the night air was cold on the mountains at this time. It was daring, I admit, but it was a means to get out of the room, and if I kept the collar clasped to my throat and the coat buttoned to the knees, no one would be aware of what I was wearing underneath.

It must have been nearly ten o'clock when I let myself out of the window and got around into the porch of the hotel. The first person I met was a policeman—or he looked like it—and I nearly fainted with the thought of arrest. But all he asked me was if I were the fiancée of Peter Armitage, and would I sign a paper for him. I signed and hurried off, telling him I was going over to the Armitage house, which was just a short distance away.

How I survived the evening I can never tell. It must be the heroic strain in my blood answering the desperate call of necessity. My entrance to the Armitage home was uneventful, except for a struggle with one of the maids, who insisted on taking my fur coat away. I replied that I was reducing and might only stay a moment, anyway. Then I met my aunt, who never dreamed of my condition, but merely thought that I had found one of my dresses.

But it was a solemn party, although Mr. Armitage tried to assure some of his guests that two Scotch friends of his, some brothers named Haig, like the great war general, would drop in as they had never failed him in an emergency like this.

As the evening wore on I danced with the elder Armitage, though I could see that he was no longer desirous of my company and was ill at ease, due to the whispers of his guests, who were waiting for the announcement of the engagement.

As for myself, I was desperately trying to be calm, though my heart was beating a tumult and my face was covered with perspiration due to the fur coat which I could not open, and which I explained to every one as my method for reducing and better than any electric cabinet bath. But once, as I danced, I was dismayed to find the coat unbuttoning and to catch my aunt's horrified eye. It was then that she chose to pull her fainting spell, which I believe was designed to serve what purpose it may eventually serve regarding her and Peter Armitage, the elder, who I will state carried her upstairs in a very gallant fashion and brought her to a room.

It was I who created the sensation, when later, I came upon them as she was coming out of the fainting spell and clinging to

Mr. Armitage, who was plainly kissing her. I ran for my guardian and explained that Bessie was being compromised, and indeed it was quite a situation when they tried to explain. Mr. Armitage grew defiant and said I might as well go ahead and sue for breach of promise. He would never marry me. It was Aunt Bessie he had really loved, but they had quarreled years ago. Although I was secretly delighted, I fled as if from the house forever.

Now if I could only get out of the place and put the money back everything would be well. But fate intervened as I was leaving, because the same policeman who stopped me at the hotel now came up with an undertaker and asked if he could see Mr. Armitage. I told him he was busy and that I would take anything or any message, and that I was stopping in the house, which was a lie then, but is the truth now. And in order to avoid him I pointed out a room on the second floor, which I knew was occupied by the nephew, or *my* Peter, as I shall call him, although it properly can never now be such. The policeman retired with the undertaker, and I saw them remove the long wooden box which lies in the room with me now. Had I but known that it contained a body and represented some secret sorrow to Mr. Armitage, I might have spoken of the matter, but I was afraid. Besides, I had not seen young Peter, who evidently could not bring himself, as he told me later, to remain in the house and hear my engagement announced to his uncle.

I returned to the hotel, unaware that my guardian and Aunt Bessie were remaining in the house.

It was after midnight, as I had agreed, that I went back to restore the money under the threat of the butler. I stole in through the French windows and was safely trying to get at the safe, when the lights went on and I was cornered by a man with a revolver. It was young Peter. A commotion sounded upstairs, even as he seized me in his strong arms and thrust me behind portières.

Down came his uncle, exclaiming that his private phone had just been rung by a house protective agency, who said the wiring was disturbed. I shivered behind the

portières, but soon the coast was clear, for nothing was found missing, or added for that matter, because I was still the terrified possessor of that thousand-dollar bill.

His uncle, who looked every year of his age now, in his bathrobe and without his slightly bald spot properly combed, demanded what Peter was doing out at that hour. So it was evident that he had just arrived. Peter promised to go up to his room and Uncle Armitage retired without seeing me. Then Peter urged me to go, and let me out of the house. I was just in time to run into the arms of two detectives on the lawn, and in spite of my pleas they hustled me back into the house, which was now thoroughly roused and boasted every one I did not want to see, including my guardian and Aunt Bessie, who flew at me, demanding what new devilry I was up to.

It is in moments like these that men show their colors. Peter stepped forward and took my hand and faced them, announcing calmly that during the evening we had eloped and he wished to present his wife.

It was a stunning moment, even if it were a false step. The detectives, who were searching for the thief of twenty thousand dollars, or rather nineteen thousand dollars, for I insist I took only the single thousand, could do nothing but let me go free.

My guardian laughed and howled and clapped Uncle Armitage on the back, while nudging Aunt Bessie, though what he could find to be hilarious about I cannot see.

Mr. Armitage congratulated us grimly, and assured Peter that he was in for a lively time. He seemed angry about something, which makes me believe that Aunt Bessie has trapped him into a compromise and that he will hold a secret yearning for me that will make him cruel when my case comes to court.

The upshot of the matter was his demand that we get upstairs and to our rooms, as it was well along in the morning.

I passed the butler on the way and he looked at me accusingly. I know he will be the chief witness against me at the trial. Of course I have not slept, and neither, I imagine, has Peter, who has been pacing up and down in the connecting room until a while ago.

It is morning and I am prepared for the worst. But this is the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God!

(Signed) FANCHON BROWNE.

From File No. 1418, the Highland Detective Agency:

DEAR CHIEF:

This here Armitage case is not complete without the above confession, which I found on a road near Justice of the Peace Milberry's house. The sappy Jane who wrote it was scared the fellow she eloped with would get wise, and tore it up. The confession clears up the difference between what we found on the butler when we searched him and the other thousand that was crumpled up on the floor. Girls are slick nowadays, chief, and I figure out that she threw it there when we caught the butler with the nineteen thousand. But that makes no difference, as he will get just as big a stretch for nineteen thou-

sand as for twenty, and we need this man Armitage's business.

Following your instructions I told Armitage it was none of my business as a private detective to interfere in that little matter of the coffin, which by the way, chief, is the slickest combination bar I ever saw. It opens like a box and has shelves with bottles, and even a brass rail and sawdust. It made me homesick! But we celebrated the capture of the butler and the elopement of the young lady by sampling a little of the best stuff that ever came down the red lane.

The kid who wrote this confession must be cuckoo if she thinks that her friend Lilah is any vamp, or that this guy Bowles is a good prizefighter. I saw Battling Davis knock him for a row of school houses in Poughkeepsie last week. And as for the vamping Jane, all she has is a bum wink that wouldn't make no Cleopatra learn anything.

No more for the present now, until the trial of the butler, so I will close.

Yours sincy,

OPERATOR 139 (DAVE).



3-38-22

by

Harry Adler

ADVENTURE links the arms of us humdrum humans in various guises: To some she proudly proclaims herself with fanfare of trumpets and gleaming cloth-of-gold and flashing armor; others she intrigues with sidelong, half-lashed glance, with mysterious smile; to others she appears garbed after the fancy of exotic distant shores; and to others still—

Myrtle, poised on the curbstone like a robin on a window-ledge, gauging the traffic current with practiced city eye, looked downward as a slight slap touched against her ankle. The blustering wind that had

blown into delightful disarray her golden hair beneath the saucy hat had flapped an envelope against her ankle and was holding it plastered there. Myrtle stooped and picked up the piece of white paper. It was an ordinary, commercial-sized envelope, unsealed.

A suave voice at her elbow intercepted her motion to toss the envelope away as a bit of street scrap.

"Thanks, miss."

A hand stretched forward. Myrtle turned toward the speaker and held out the envelope, when a second man leaped forward and struck aside her wrist.

"No!" he cried. "Don't give it to him! It's mine!" And he reached to Myrtle for the envelope.

At his explosive intrusion into the scene Myrtle had instinctively snatched back her hand and stepped a pace backward. She now held the object of dispute behind her back and swiftly appraised the two men.

The first was of medium height, stockily built; his heavily fleshed jowl was clean shaven, showing a bluish tinge beneath the abundance of powder. His eyes were dark, a hard, cold, unpleasant forcefulness lying in their depths. A flashy diamond gleamed in his necktie.

The other man was slightly shorter, thin to emaciation. His nose was long and bony, with thin, cruel nostrils; the mouth, too, was thin and evil-looking; his weak blue eyes were close set, fringed with pale, yellowish lashes, shaded with scanty brows of the same color. Innumerable freckles covered his face.

The city working girl, alone and protected by nothing but her own wits and the washroom retailed experiences of her sisters, develops a judgment sure and keen. Myrtle's quick, instinctive reaction to the strangers was decisively antagonistic.

"Who does this belong to?" she demanded.

"To me!" Only by the movement of their lips and the difference of intonation could Myrtle tell that both men had spoken.

She laughed.

"Looks like a case for Solomon," she said. "The envelope isn't mine and I'm ready to turn it over to whoever it belongs to, if you can decide—"

"It's mine," the first man interposed. "I just bought it from this party; I was holding it in my hand when the wind blew it out and—"

"It's a lie!" burst out the other. "I was holding it when the wind caught it," he explained to Myrtle. "I ain't sold it to him yet, and"—defiantly—"don't know as I'm going to, either."

The first man ignored the speaker. He fixed his gaze on Myrtle and again extended his hand.

"Give it to me," he insisted. "You'll save yourself a lot of trouble. Believe me,

miss, you don't want to get mixed up in this thing. Give me the envelope and just forget it. Let us settle our own scrap; but keep out of it yourself—it'll only mean trouble for you."

Myrtle hesitated. After all, what was it to her? Let them fight it out themselves—she certainly had no interest in the affair. But the freckled man broke excitedly:

"You'll get into worse trouble by giving it to him! It's mine and don't you for a minute think I'll stand for your handing it over to him. He just wants to beat me out of what's due me."

"He's bluffing," calmly interposed the other. "Don't you be afraid of him. He wouldn't dare do a thing. Give me the envelope and you're through."

Myrtle's perplexed eyes caught among the figures of the hurrying passers-by a blue uniform, idly moving along the sidewalk.

"It looks to me," she announced, "like this is a case the police ought to take a hand in deciding. The whole thing seems sort of fishy."

She took a step in the direction of the officer. As though released by a single spring two hands shot forward, each fastening itself on an arm. Into the eyes of the smaller man swept a look of terror; the other's face hardened in cold menace. Myrtle felt suddenly a tremendous sense of relief that the affair was occurring in broad daylight on a busy downtown corner.

"It's none of their business," the stocky man said harshly. "Don't ball this up worse than it already is."

A minute he hesitated; then:

"I'll give you one hundred dollars for that envelope—cash." He dug into his trousers pocket and pulled his hand forth, filled with carelessly crumpled bills.

"I'll make it two hundred—three hundred!" the other frantically raised the offer.

The first man turned a cold, amused glance of contempt on the speaker.

"Three hundred dollars—dig it up," he invited sarcastically, "so the lady can know you mean business."

"I—I ain't got it with me," the man confessed, miserably, "but—but I'll sure pay it to you," he assured Myrtle, his des-

perate earnestness ludicrous in his thoroughly negligible person.

Myrtle's violet eyes had widened in amazement at the bidding for the apparently insignificant bit of paper. With a quick movement she thrust the envelope into the neck of her blouse.

"Listen, you two," she commanded. "I haven't got all day to stand here and argue with you. You decide who's entitled to the envelope and then let me know and you can have it. You can let me know where to meet you by an ad in the Personals in to-morrow morning's *Times*. But," she warned, "it'll have to be daytime and it'll have to be some downtown corner like this. And you'll both have to be there, so I'll know the right party gets it."

She stepped off the curb. "If you try to follow me I'll turn it over to the police. I'm not going to have you hound me all over town."

She darted swiftly through the maze of traffic, and with quick backward glances to make sure she was not followed by either of the two men, made her way to the insurance office wherein by her stenographic activities she earned her living.

She dropped the bank book on the cashier's desk—it was on her way back from her daily trip to the bank that the affair had occurred—and passed down the rows of desks to her own. She seated herself before her typewriter, and drew from her blouse the envelope. It was thoroughly innocent in appearance, slightly dust-streaked from its trip along the sidewalk. Its face was unaddressed, and in the upper left hand corner it bore no name, carrying as a printed return address simply a post office box number.

The unsealed flap lifted temptingly. What was the mysterious content of the envelope that it should have made the men so eager to secure it, each for himself—so desperately anxious to prevent each other from obtaining it—and so unitedly determined to prevent its being brought to the attention of the police? Myrtle's fingers toyed tantalizingly at the edge of the envelope's mouth. It was not sealed—surely there was nothing dishonest in just taking a look. Besides—perhaps it contained

something that really should be turned over to the authorities.

Curiosity conquered. She thrust her fingers within, drew out the single sheet of folded paper it contained and spread it out on her desk. It was a half sheet of plain, unprinted white paper, evidently torn from a scratch pad; across it was scrawled in large, pencil figures: 3-38-22.

Myrtle's tip-tilted little nose wrinkled in perplexed amazement as she stared at the bit of paper before her. 3-38-22! What on earth could that mean? What hidden message of sufficient importance to cause such anxiety over its possession could lurk behind those mystic figures? 3-38-22!

Myrtle's smooth, white brow furrowed and the berry mouth puckered with the intenseness of her perplexity. But her usually sharp brain failed to extract any meaning from the mystic message. With a shrug of her round, georgette-covered shoulders she slipped the paper back into the envelope and thrust that back into its former resting place.

The succession of "proofs of loss" that she fed through her typewriter the balance of the afternoon were meaningless to Myrtle. The clatter of typewriters and adding machines, the ring of telephone bells, the harsh purr of buzzers—all the variegated dissonances of a large, busy office—swirled in unheeded whorls above her head. Her brain had space for but those mysterious symbols: 3-38-22!

At times she gazed thoughtfully through the glass division into the adjusters' room where, above the lower wooden half of the partition was visible the keen, clean cut profile of Fred Rowe. Between Myrtle and Fred an "understanding" practically existed and the girl was strongly tempted to put the problem before his sharp intelligence. But she knew that he would sternly forbid her to involve herself any further in any such questionable affair—and her spirit of adventure was aroused; she wanted to see the thing through, or, at least, a little further along.

Eagerly next morning she ran down the Personal column of her paper, jumping impatiently the many "handsome, refined widows" in search of middle-aged bache-

lors with home-loving instincts and maternally inclined incomes. Midway of the column she found what she sought:

If the young lady who picked up the envelope at the corner of Third and Grand Streets will be at the same corner at about the same time this afternoon satisfactory arrangements can be made.

But farther down, as Myrtle suspected there would be, was a second item:

The girl who found the envelope: Please be at Fourth and Market at noon to-day. It will be to your advantage.

Myrtle smiled grimly and tossed the paper aside. Each of the men apparently was still trying to outwit the other, probably intending to get her to himself, then attempting to bribe her into delivering the envelope. She was not fool enough to fall for anything as obvious as that. At noon-time she kept carefully out of range of the designated corner and that afternoon, pleading a headache, another girl made the trip to the bank in Myrtle's stead.

The next morning she again scanned the Personals. Apparently the men, each seeing his ruse had failed, had got together, for there was but one item, appointing the place and hour of the original meeting; the significant line was added: "We will both be there."

Of this latter fact Myrtle, on her way back from the bank, made sure before she approached the corner. A wave of relief swept visibly across the strained, anxious faces of the two men as the girl stepped up to them.

"You can give me the envelope," the dark man announced, extending his hand. "We've fixed it up between ourselves."

Myrtle looked inquiringly at the other man.

"How about it?" she queried. "Is that O. K.?"

A furtive, cunning gleam came into the watery eyes. He slipped his hand into his pocket and jerked out a wad of bills.

"Here's five hundred dollars," he said, thrusting his face close to the girl's and holding out the money. "Give it to me, quick!"

His companion, at this attempted *coup*, turned on the little man a look of infinite, cold wrath.

"Trying to double-cross me, huh?" he accused. "Didn't you agree that I was to get it?"

"Yah—so you could tell me to go to hell afterward!" spluttered the other, his lips curling in a snarl.

"I sure wasn't going to pay you till I had the envelope. Do you think I'll let you get it now? Five hundred dollars! Where did you get it—from Bill Sparks?" The other's flush and defiant scowl showed the accuracy of the guess. "A fine chance I'd have if you got it now. You'd beat it right down to Sparks and peddle it to him."

Sudden decision formed in Myrtle's mind.

"I'm through with you two birds," she announced. "I've listened to your debate long enough. There's something phoney about the whole deal, and it certainly looks to me like a case for the police."

The hard menace leaped into the dark man's eyes, while the thin man's face went the color of liberally watered milk.

"Don't do that," warned the first. "You'll only get yourself into trouble that doesn't belong to you."

"But it'll probably get you two something that you've got coming to you. Those figures don't look to me like any Sunday School lesson assignment."

"So you looked inside!" The menace in the voice deepened and the realization flashed through Myrtle that she had committed a serious error in making the admission. Without awaiting her reply the man turned on his companion.

"Was there anything there, Speck, that night—"

The man licked his lips.

"No," he said, "nothing, only the—the figures."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

Myrtle stepped to the curb.

"If you dare to follow me," she threatened, "I'll stop the first policeman I come to."

"Don't worry," the dark man assured her, "we won't follow you."

There was a queer, cold smile on his lips that chilled Myrtle. She glanced about in apprehension, but the passing throng seemed intent on its own affairs. Against the front of the cigar store at that corner a hatchet-faced youth was leaning, idly smoking, but his attention seemed riveted on the disclosures of the wind-swirled short skirts traversing the crossing.

Myrtle stepped into the street, darted behind a clanging street car and sped back to the office. Glancing over her shoulder it did seem to her once as though the hatchet face of the smoking youth stood out momentarily among the indistinct faces of the street crowd behind her, but she dismissed the notion as a silly, nervous fancy.

At the office she immediately betook herself to the adjusters' room and laid on Fred's desk the mysterious envelope. Breathlessly she related the story of her adventure. The young man's face became serious as the tale unfolded and the lines about the firm mouth tightened.

"You did a mighty foolish thing, Myrtle," he said, "going back to meet them. Why the dickens didn't you tell me?"

"I knew you'd object to my going ahead with it, and I was curious to see what would happen."

He grinned.

"You bet I'd have objected. It certainly looks crooked."

He studied the figures on the outspread piece of paper.

"3-38-22," he murmured; "what the dickens can it mean? Looks like a three-cornered game score—or football signals; maybe it's some sort of price quotation, or— By George!" he suddenly exclaimed, "I'll bet I know what it is—a safe combination!" His gray eyes sparkled with the sudden flash of inspiration.

Myrtle's face reflected his excitement.

"I believe you're right!" she agreed. "Still," and her brows wrinkled, "whichever one of the two the envelope belonged to would know what it was and wouldn't care about getting the bit of paper back."

Fred studied over this phase for a moment.

"Probably it's a combination that doesn't belong to either of them. They

may have got hold of it by accident or stolen it and not had a chance to memorize it."

"But why should each be so scared of the other fellow getting it? If they are both in together on it what difference would it make who took the envelope from me?"

Fred shook his head.

"Search me," he said.

He twisted the paper and the envelope in his fingers.

"Wonder if this post office box number means anything," he pondered. He lifted his telephone receiver and called the post office. But on inquiring as to the holder of that box number he was abruptly informed that regulations did not permit of divulging such information.

"Well," he said, "I suppose the thing to do is turn it over to the police and let them worry it out."

Myrtle made a wry face.

"Why bother? They'll be fussing around, and maybe there's nothing to it after all, and then we'll look like a couple of fools. Besides, those two birds don't know these figures, so they can't do any damage. That's why I refused to deliver the envelope to them. Let's just forget it, and throw this thing away."

"Well," Fred agreed reluctantly, "I suppose they can't do anything as long as they don't know this combination, or whatever these figures are."

He replaced the paper in the envelope and put the latter in his pocket.

"I think I had better keep this," he said. "You'd better watch your step for a while—you can't tell what those sort of fellows are likely to try, and we don't know how important they may think this to be. At the least sign of anything suspicious, you be sure to tell me. Without fail, now, young lady—come right to me!"

Myrtle, making a teasing *mouse* at this stern insistence, departed for her own desk; but that evening, walking as usual toward her not far-distant boarding house, she kept Fred's warning in mind. Her keenly darting eyes, however, failed to discern anything suspicious. The two men were nowhere in evidence.

She turned into a quiet cross street. A

limousine, chugging past her, sputtered spasmodically and in the middle of the block drew up to the curb and halted. The driver, getting out of his seat, lifted the hood for an inspection of the still active motor. As Myrtle, casually noting the occurrence, approached, the driver straightened and addressed her.

"Pardon me, miss," he said, "can you tell me where the nearest garage is?"

The girl stopped and faced the speaker. A sudden thrill of fear shot through her. The chauffeur was the hatchet-faced smoker! She started back, but at the instant the man leaped toward her, pressed his palm over her mouth and flung his other arm about her. At the same moment the door of the limousine flew open and the two men of the envelope sprang out. The next moment Myrtle was within the car in the company of the two men; the machine, its motor now a marvel of rhythmic motion, sped away. All was quiet and undisturbed in the deserted street behind.

After the first shock of resistance Myrtle had fainted. When she came to her senses she was at once conscious of rough hands exploring intimately her person and clothing. But it was evident that the seeker was far too intent upon the object of his search to have any interest in the girl herself. Myrtle jerked herself free and with quick touches straightened the disarray of her attire. The dark man, baffled in his search, glowered at her with fierce malignity.

"Where's that envelope?" he demanded.

"I haven't got it," the girl retorted, adding defiantly, "and it's where you can't get it, either."

The heat of the man's anger sank, leaving him cold, calculatingly hostile, an attitude that inspired far deeper fear in Myrtle than his former air.

"Watch that door, Speck," the man commanded his freckled companion. He forced Myrtle to the seat between himself and the other man.

"Now listen," he addressed her grimly. "We're going to get that envelope, so you might as well make up your mind to that now. Where is it?"

"I turned it over to the police," bluffed Myrtle. "If you know what's good for

you you'll let me out right now and skip. They're probably pretty close on your trail already."

The man shook his head.

"You're lying. You didn't turn it over to the cops. My pal—the guy driving this car—followed you after you left us this afternoon and trailed you to the office. He watched there all afternoon, and you didn't leave the place, and there wasn't any detective up to see you, either; there isn't a man on the force my pal don't know—Where is that envelope?"

Myrtle's brain worked swiftly. To divulge its actual location would endanger Fred, and that procedure was at once dismissed. Yet she must extricate herself from this situation.

"I destroyed it," she said. "I was afraid to keep it, and thought the easiest way to get rid of the whole affair would be to throw it away. I tore it up and threw the pieces out of the window."

Unflinchingly her gaze met the piercing probe of the dark, threatening eyes.

The man called Speck, at Myrtle's announcement, burst into a loud, almost sobbing wail.

"Tore it up and threw it away!" he shrilled. "My God! Four rotten months I slaved in that store like a cheap clerk just for a chance to get that combination—and this is what happens to it! Damn you, Blaine, it's your fault!"

The other man turned on him fiercely.

"It's your own fault, you damn fool!" he exclaimed. "If you had let me get the envelope when it first blew away there'd have been nothing to it."

"Why didn't you give me my money?"

"I was ready to give you the two thousand I promised you. If you hadn't tried to hold me up for five thousand you'd have got your money right off."

"It was worth five thousand. If you don't get fifty thousand out of that safe it's your own fault."

"I bargained with you for two thousand before you started on the job, and you agreed to get the combination for that. Then you decided to get hoggish and tried to peddle it between Bill Sparks and me. And I won't stand being held up."

The maze of thoughts that had been tangling in Myrtle's brain the past two days began to unsnarl. So those mystic figures were, as Fred had guessed, a safe combination, about the sale of which Speck had been dickering with the other man when the wind had entered the transaction; Speck, fearful lest he never receive his pay should the combination fall into Blaine's hands had, of course, attempted to repossess himself of the envelope, while the other had seen in the accident an opportunity to procure the combination without the payment of an exorbitant price.

"Can't you remember the combination, Speck?" Blaine asked.

The other shook his head sadly.

"I only saw it for a minute—just long enough to scribble it down. I knew old man Hensley kept it in the note book in his vest pocket, but he always wore his vest. He just happened to take it off that day, it being so hot, and when he left his office for a minute I grabbed my chance. I jotted it down, stuck it in the envelope and beat it. And I came at once to you without looking at it. I ain't got no idea what it is."

Blaine turned to Myrtle.

"Do you remember the figures on that piece of paper?" he demanded.

Hope for liberation flashed into the girl's brain.

"If I tell you will you let me go?" she bargained.

"Sure! You're no good to us—you're only in our way. What we want is that combination."

For upwards of two days those figures had occupied Myrtle's brain almost exclusively. A moment she hesitated; then:

"Three—forty-eight—thirty-two."

Her inquisitor turned to Speck.

"Does that sound right?" he inquired.

The other shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"It sort of sounds like it," he said, hesitantly, "but I can't be sure. Damned if I know."

Blaine's eyes pierced Myrtle's.

"Are you sure that that's right?" he queried, meaningly.

"Yes," she stoutly affirmed.

For a minute the man pondered. Then he lifted his head in decision.

"We'll just make sure of that," he said. He turned to Speck. "There's only one way to be certain she's giving us the right dope, and that's to take her with us on the job. Then if it's wrong"—and he turned his menacing smile on the girl—"maybe we can sort of freshen her memory."

"You don't mean to pull the job with her watching?" incredulously.

"Why not? She knows too much already. If we let her go now she'll hustle right off for the station; that'll make it too risky, and we'll have to beat it out of town and drop the job. If we tackle it to-night we can lose her afterward and make our get-away. And she won't know much more than she knows now, so we don't run any more risk."

"Well," the other said, "it's up to you. Give me my two thousand and do what you like."

"Nothing doing! If you expect your share you'll stay with us till we know you've got it coming. Suppose she's given us the wrong dope—this is a damn ticklish job; if it wasn't so juicy I'd throw it up altogether. But I'm certainly not going to give you anything the way it stands now."

"That was the agreement!" cried the other. "I was to get you the combination for two thousand dollars, and then I was through. I don't go in for the rough stuff and you know it. I ain't going to take no chances."

"Then you'll get no divvy," was the grim response. "I agreed to give you two thousand for the combination—but you haven't delivered. All you've done is ball the whole thing up. Now you'll come along with Joe and me to-night—or else drop off here."

The watery eyes became still more moist. "I never go into the rough stuff," he wailed desperately. "You know I don't—I can't stand it!"

"Suit yourself!"

"Damn you, Blaine!" Speck cursed in despair. "I'll—". Sputtering weakly he sank back on the cushions, the conflict between cupidity and cowardice raging palpably across his countenance.

Myrtle had listened in horror to the plan as proposed by Blaine. It was a prospect that well might dismay even her plucky spirit.

"You promised to let me go!" she cried.

"I will—when we're sure you're not lying. How do we know those are the right figures?"

"They are the ones that were on that paper," she insisted doggedly.

"If they are," he assured her, "you'll be free a little after midnight. Until then we'll have to hang on to you. Anyway, we've got to hold you till after the job. Otherwise you'll be sure to tip the cops off, and we'll have to pass it up."

Myrtle's eyes darted wildly about. The man intercepted her intention. He seized her arm.

"Speck!" he commanded. "Decide now—what are you going to do? Come on, now, no argument!"

"I guess I'll stick it out—damn you!"

"Then sit up and watch your side. We don't want her to get away. Now, listen, girlie," he addressed Myrtle, "let me give you a piece of advice. We're in this thing pretty deep now, and we're going to take no chances; and there's a big pot up. If you make any move to escape, or try to shout for help or do anything else foolish, we'll have to get nasty. We're going to drive out of town and ride around till it's time to get busy. And if you've told the truth you'll be free as soon as we're through. Of course, if you've lied"—he shrugged his shoulders—"it depends how stubborn you are as to how rough we'll have to get. But you might as well get it through your head: we're going to get into that safe to-night!"

A slight shiver swept Myrtle's frame at the threat in the tone, but she bravely set her teeth in her lip and leaned back. There was nothing for her to do but watch her opportunity as developments materialized. But even in her terror she determined that only in the most extreme necessity would she divulge the correct figures.

Blaine, through the speaking tube, explained the plans to the driver, and the car sped toward and past the city's edge.

At a little town along the road dinner was had, served on trays inside the ma-

chine on Blaine's explanation of "the lady's indisposition." Myrtle, who had hoped for a chance to escape, considered wildly the possibility of crying for help as the waiter passed in the trays. But beside her she felt the warning press of Blaine's body, in front she heard the unchecked pulsating of the motor, and through the glass partition she could see the figure of the driver sitting alert, one hand on the brake, ready for instant flight at her first untoward move. She sank back and angrily pushed aside the tray offered her.

The hours that followed seemed interminable to Myrtle. Silent, her spirit a chaos of mingled defiance, terror and hope, she leaned back against the cushions, her keen eyes intently alert for the first suggestion of a possibility of escape. She had from the very outset dismissed the idea of pleading her way to freedom.

Monotonously they rolled along rough roads and smooth boulevards, through towns totally unfamiliar to the girl, stopping at none of them. Once, running low on gasoline, they halted on a lonely, dark road, by a clump of trees, about a mile from a small village. Blaine and Speck, holding Myrtle between them, dismounted and stepped into the blackness of the trees, while Joe proceeded to the village. Having refilled his tank he returned, whereupon his passengers reëntered and the aimless traveling was resumed.

At length they returned to the city. The streets were deserted and only occasional automobiles passed by. At the heart of the downtown district they turned into an alley, coming to a stop in a spot of intense blackness. The driver turned off all the lights, but left the motor humming at a repressed, smooth pitch. He came round to the door and opened it.

"Well?" he inquired. "I've got the tools."

In the blackness of the night all was invisible but the dim, indistinct white of the men's faces, and Myrtle shivered in terror.

"Speck," Blaine spoke, "watch the girl till Joe and I open the window. Now watch her!" he stressed sharply. "Here's a gun; take no chances! It's about all you'll be good for on this job."

Myrtle felt Speck reach out and a moment later she felt a small, hard pressure against her ribs. At the same time her warder grasped her arm in his free hand.

The other two disappeared. Frantic schemes for escape raced through Myrtle's brain, but at the slightest shifting of her position she felt the grip on her arm tighten and the gun against her ribs jerk painfully closer. She shuddered. Her life was hanging on the steadiness of Speck's nerves; her impression of him was conducive to extreme caution in her movements.

Ages passed; then:

"All right," came the whisper from the inky sea at the car's door; "bring her along."

On dismounting the girl's wrist was seized by Blaine, and with Speck urging from behind with his revolver she stumbled a short distance down the alleyway. A pencil beam from a pocket flashlight showed Myrtle a gaping window; the protective grating had been sawed out and the pane of glass removed. Joe clambered through, followed by Blaine. With the latter pulling, and Speck, from behind, pushing, Myrtle in a few moments stood within the building. Speck followed her. Apparently they were in a rear store room; all about lay pasteboard cartons, boxes, small barrels and heaps of excelsior.

Warily, guided by the beam from the flashlight, they proceeded in single file to the door at the farther end. Joe, leading, opened the door; they passed through, and—

The room leaped into brilliance! Every inch of space seemed suddenly occupied by an electric lamp intent on expending its every atom of being in one final blaze of dazzlement.

And almost at the same instant uniformed figures sprang into existence in every corner, and a formidable circle of revolver muzzles concentrated on the four intruders.

"Put 'em up!" the command barked. "Make it snappy!"

With an oath Joe and Blaine complied; Speck, with a stifling gurgle, sank slobbering to the floor.

From the midst of the bewildering army

of uniforms a civilian figure sprang forward. With a cry of relief Myrtle sank into his arms.

"Fred!" she sobbed. "I'm so glad to see you!"

A few blissful moments—then explanations.

"I got to thinking the affair over," Fred said, "and the more I thought of it the less I liked it, and the more uneasy I got about you. Along about the middle of the evening I phoned to see if you were O. K. Well, when they told me you hadn't come home to dinner I streaked down to the police station. They learned from the post office that the box number belonged to the Hensley Jewelry Company; they use that blind envelope in sending out duns to their installment customers. When old man Hensley saw that piece of paper he nearly had a hemorrhage. It was the combination to his big wall safe, where all his valuable stuff is kept over night. I described the two men as you described them to me, and Hensley recognized the freckled fellow as a clerk who had been working for him a few months, but who had left without notice the day your affair started. We figured that they would do the job to-night, as you knew too much for them to delay any longer; they knew that as soon as they set you free you'd be sure to notify the police. An officer has been waiting at your boarding house all evening, and other men have been scouring the city, while we've been waiting here. Lord!" He heaved a tremendous sigh. "When I saw you were with them, all O. K.—what a grand and glorious feeling!"

The girl snuggled deliciously into the curve of his arm. Hazily she was conscious that the crooks were being herded by the officers into the patrol wagon that had clanged its way to the front door.

An elderly, portly, excited man stepped in front of the happy pair.

"You two kids!" he addressed them. "To-morrow you come into this store and pick out your engagement ring—as a little mark of appreciation from Hensley's. And when you've decided on the date I claim the privilege of furnishing likewise the wedding ring!"

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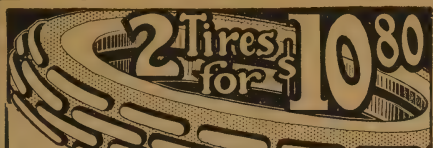
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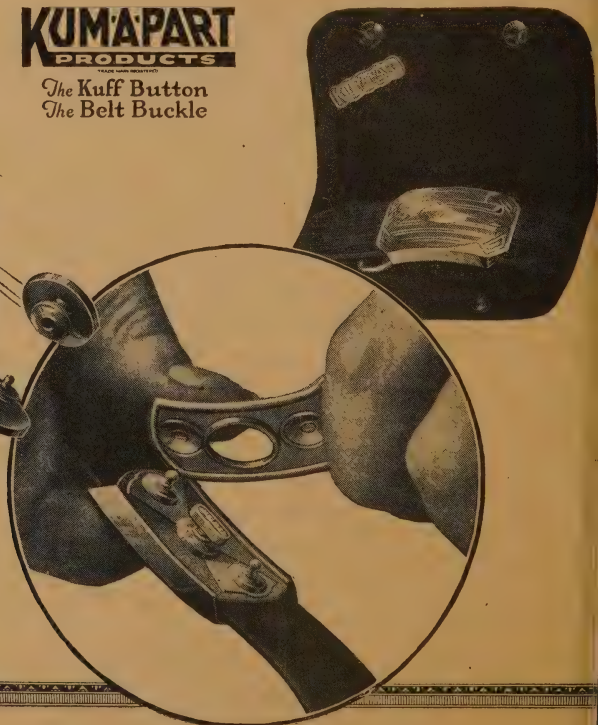
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The Belt Buckle*

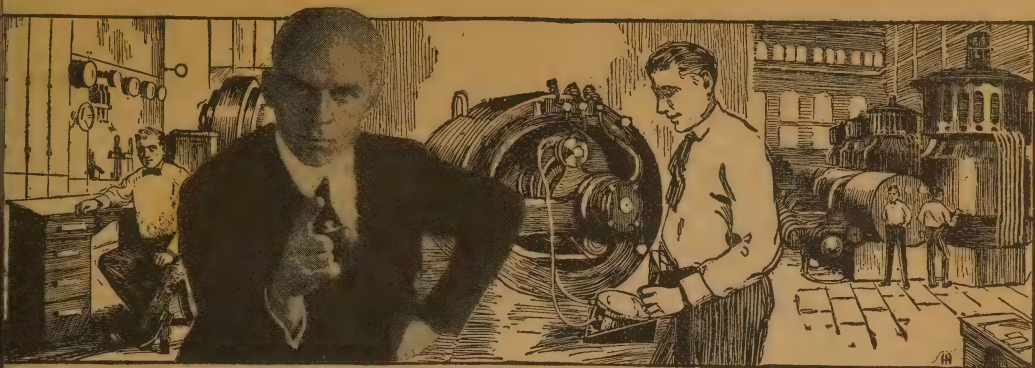
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLII

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NUMBER 4

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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

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June 10th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close May 13th.

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DELICIOUS DRINKS in powder. Just add cold water and sugar. Orangeade, Cherry-Julep, etc. Fine for Home, Picnics, Dances, Entertainments, etc. **AGENTS WANTED.** 85¢ Clear profit on each dollar selling by the glass. Send dime for 10 glass pkg., best drink you ever tasted, and partic. postpaid. 7 kinds 50c. **MORRISSEY CO.**, 4417-30 Madison St., Chicago.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendota, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

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AGENTS—98c per hour demonstrating and taking orders for new patented automatic, self-winding, indoor and outdoor clothes line and reel; no capital or experience needed. You sell, we deliver and collect. Sample free to workers. Universal Appliance Company, Dept. 647, 57 Main St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Photo Pillow Tops, Portraits, Frames, Sheet Pictures, Pennants. Religious Pictures, Medallions, Merchants Sign, Specialties, Waterproof Aprons, Gold Window Letters. Catalog Free. 30 days credit. **JAS. C. BAILEY CO.**, Desk G-5, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS! 1922's GREATEST SENSATION. 11 piece toilet article set selling like blazes at \$1.75 with \$1.00 dressmaker's shears free to each customer. Line up with Davis for 1922. E. M. Davis Co., Dept. 58, Chicago.

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AGENTS—\$6 to \$12 a Day. Take orders for Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Brand new. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Sample to workers. **JENNINGS MFG. COMPANY**, Dept. 1709, Dayton, Ohio.

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MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

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\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. **Lacassian Co.**, Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

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WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—\$75.00 to \$150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. **A. E. Aldridge**, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.

Responsible firm offers big opportunity; wonderful invention plumbing unnecessary; thousands enthusiastic users; representatives wanted; exclusive territory. Experience unnecessary. Free sales helps. Write today. **ROBINSON HOUSEHOLD MFG. CO.**, Dept. A-4, Factories Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



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Classified Advertising continued from page 4.



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STAMPS FREE—Fine Set War Stamps, surcharged, unused pictorials. British and French Colonies, with large illustrated catalogue free for 2c postage. MIDLAND STAMP COMPANY, Toronto, Canada.

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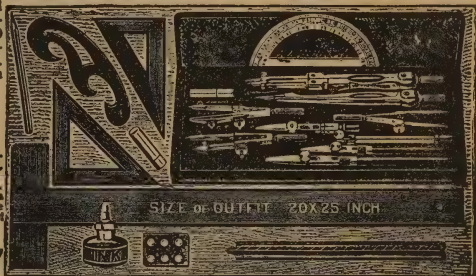
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The Further Adventures of Zorro

Part I by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

CHAPTER I.

LAND RATS AND WATER RATS.

THROUGHOUT a long summer day of more than a hundred years ago the high fog had obscured the flaming ball of sun, and the coast of Southern California had been bathed in a haze.

Then came the night, with indication of a drizzle that did not materialize. For the bank of fog suddenly was split as though with a sword, and the brilliant moon poured down, and the riven mist floated away to let the land be blessed with brilliance and the tossing sea dance in the silvery moonbeams.

Approaching the shore came a sinister vessel, craft of ill omen. She sailed slowly under a spare spread of canvas, as though fearing to reach her destination too soon, and her lights were not burning. The hiss of the waters from her bows was a lazy

sort of hiss, but the more suggestive because of that. It was the playful hiss of a serpent always ready to become enraged. Her appearance betokened stealth and crime.

She was low, rakish, swift. No proper seaman commanded her, since her decks were foul and her sides badly in need of protecting paint. But her sailing gear was in perfect condition, and the man at her helm could have told that she answered to her rudder like a love-sick maiden to her swain.

Amidships stood her commander, one Barbados, a monstrous giant of a man with repugnant visage. Gigantic brass rings were in his mutilated ears. His eyes were pig-like—tiny, glittering, wholly evil. His great gnarled hands continually were forming themselves into brutish fists. He wore no shirt, no shoes. His chest and back were covered with thick, black, matted hair.

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"By the saints!" he swore in a voice that drowned the slush of the waters against the vessel's sides. "Sanchez! Fools and devils! Is it necessary to shout to the world our villainy? Look at that flag flapping against the mast! Three hours after set of sun, and the flag of the devil still flies! Discipline! Ha!"

"The flag!" Sanchez bellowed. There was no definite order given, but the man nearest the mast was quick to lower the flag. Sanchez looked back toward Barbados, and Barbados grunted and turned away to look toward the distant land.

Sanchez was a smaller edition of Barbados, the evil lieutenant of an evil chief. He was short and thick, and many a man had misjudged the strength of his shoulders and arms and had discovered his sorry error too late. The eyes of Sanchez glittered also, first as he looked at Barbados, and then turned, as the chief had, to glance toward the distant land.

A fair land it was, bathed in the mellow light of the moon. Along the shore uncertain shadows played, like shapeless fairies at a game. And here was a darker streak, where a cañon ran down to the sea—a cañon with black depths caused by the rank undergrowth and stubby trees.

"There!" Barbados bellowed. He pointed toward the mouth of the cañon, where the water hissed white against a jumble of rocks. "We go ashore there, against the cliffs!"

Again there was no regular command, but the course of the pirate craft was changed a little, and she sailed slowly toward the spot Barbados had indicated. The chief grunted once more, and Sanchez hurried quickly to his side.

"We land twoscore men!" Barbados commanded. "Twoscore will be enough. I lead them, and you are to go with me. The others will remain aboard and take the ship off shore again, and return to-morrow night two hours before the dawn."

"Si!" Sanchez said.

"'Tis to be a pretty party, by the saints! Rich loot, food and wines, honey and olives, gold and jewels and precious stones! Bronze native wenches for such as like them! And time enough for it, eh? Ha!"

For some four months we have sailed up and down the coast, now and then landing and raiding to get a few pigs and cows. 'Tis time for a bold stroke! And this—"

"It is arranged?" Sanchez questioned.

"Am I in the habit of rushing in where things are not arranged?" Barbados demanded. "Señor Pirate, do you take me to be a week and silly fool?"

"If I did," Sanchez replied, "I would have more wit than to say so to your face!"

"Ha! Is it arranged? When the Governor's own man arranges it? There is a precious pair, the Governor and his man!" said Barbados, laughing raucously. "Pirates and rogues we may be, but we can take lessons in villainy from some of the gentry who bear the names of *caballeros*, but have foul blood in their veins!"

"The thing has an evil look," Sanchez was bold enough to assert. "I like not a task too easy. By my naked blade, that which looks easy often is not! If this should prove to be a trap—"

Barbados gave a cry of rage and whirled toward him suddenly, and Sanchez retreated a single step, and his hand dropped to the naked cutlass in his belt of tanned human skin.

"Try to draw it, fool!" Barbados cried. "I'll have you choked black in the face and hurled overboard for shark meat before your hand reaches the blade!"

"I made no move to draw," Sanchez waived.

"There are times when I wonder why I allow you to remain at my side," Barbados told him, folding his gigantic arms across his hairy chest. "And there are times when I wonder whether your heart is not turning to that of a woman and your blood to water or swill. A trap, you fool! Am I the man to walk into traps? Kindly allow me to attend to the finer details of this business. And a pretty business it is!"

"The village of Reina de Los Angeles is miles in the interior," Sanchez waived. "I do not like to get out of sight of the sea. With the pitching planks of a deck beneath my bare feet—"

"Beware lest you have beneath your feet the plank that is walked until a man reaches its end and drops to watery death!"

Barbados warned him. "Enough of this! Pick the men who are to land, and get ready the boats!"

An hour later the anchor had been dropped, and the pirate craft had swung with the tide and was tugging at her chains like a puppy at a leash. Over the sides went the boats, Barbados growling soft curses at the noise his men made.

"We have nothing to fear, fools and devils!" he said. "But there will be no surprise if some converted native sees us and carries to Reina de Los Angeles word of our arrival. There is many a *hacienda* in these parts where pirates are detested. Silence, rogues! You'll have your fill of noise to-morrow night!"

Without knowing it, Barbados practiced a deal of psychology. These wild men of the sea had before them a journey of some miles inland, and they knew it and hated it, but the pirate chief continually hinted to them of the rich loot at the end of the present trip, and his hints served their purpose well.

Toward the shore they rowed, tossing on the breakers, making for the dark spot where the cañon ran down into the sea. There a cliff some twelve feet high circled back into the land, forming a natural shelter against the land breeze at times and the sea winds at other times.

Through the surf they splashed, half naked, carrying naught except their weapons, and no weapons save their cutlasses. They gathered on the beach and watched the boats return to the ship, shrieking coarse jests at the men compelled to remain behind.

Barbaros took from his belt a tiny scrap of parchment and looked at it closely. With him this passed for a map. He called Sanchez to his side, turned his back to the sea, and looked along the dark reaches of the cañon.

"Forward!" Barbados said. "And let there be little noise about it! If we stumble across one of the accursed natives, slit his throat and so silence it."

"And if we meet a wandering *fray* of the missions, slit him into ribbons," Sanchez added, chuckling.

To his wonder, Barbados grasped his arm

so that Sanchez thought the bone must break.

"Enough of that!" Barbados cried. "Touch no *fray* in violence except I give the word!"

"You love the robes and gowns?" Sanchez asked, in wonder.

"I love to protect myself," Barbados replied. "It is an ill thing to assault a *fray* if it can be avoided." He stopped speaking for a moment, and seemed to shiver throughout the length and breadth of his gigantic frame. "I had a friend once who struck a *fray*," he added in a whisper. "I do not like to remember what happened to him. Forward!"

Inland they tramped, mile after mile, keeping to the cañons, following an *arroyo* now and then, dodging from dark spot to dark spot, while Barbados growled curses at the bright moon and Sanchez continually admonished the men behind to keep silent.

It was a journey they disliked, but they liked to think of the loot they would find at the end of it. On they went, toward the sleeping town of Reina de Los Angeles. Besides Barbados and Sanchez, few of them had seen the town. Pirates had been treated harshly there when they had wandered inland. But now something had happened, it appeared, that made a raid on the town a comparatively safe enterprise.

An hour before dawn they stumbled across a native, caught him as he started to flee, and left his lifeless body behind. Then came the day, and they went into hiding in a jumble of hills, within easy striking distance of the town. They had covered ground well.

Sprawled on the sward they slept. Barbados, a little way aside, consulted his poor map once more, and then called Sanchez to his side.

"Since we may have to split our force, it were well that you knew more of this business," he said.

"I am listening, Barbados."

"This man who is to meet us to-morrow night at the edge of the town is a high official."

"I have heard you call him the Governor's man."

"Even so. He is to have matters ar-

ranged so that the town will be at our mercy. It never has been raided properly. It will be necessary, perhaps, to steal horses, and possibly a *carreta* or two in which to carry the loot. The town will be wide open for us, my friend."

"There is a *presidio* in Reina de Los Angeles, and where there is a *presidio* there are soldiers," Sanchez reminded him.

"And where there are soldiers there are fools," Barbados added. He stopped speaking long enough to chuckle. "I am not afraid of the soldiers. This man with whom we are to deal will care for the troops."

"I fail to understand it," Sanchez said, shaking his head. "Why should such things be? Do we split the loot with this high official?"

"Dream of innocence, listen!" Barbados hissed. "Listen, and comprehend, else I choke you to death! An emissary came to me in the south from this high official, and through him arrangements were made. Things have happened since last we were in the vicinity of Reina de Los Angeles. The Governor, I know, left San Francisco de Asis and journeyed south with his gallant company. And while he was at Reina de Los Angeles something happened that caused him to hate the town. There even was talk for a time of him being forced to abdicate his high station."

"Ha! More mystery!" Sanchez growled.

"It seems that in the southland there was a pest of a highwayman known as Señor Zorro, and whom men called the Curse of Capistrano. A land pirate, spit upon him! How can a man be a pirate on the land? However, this Señor Zoro did several things worthy of note. From what I have heard, I would we had a dozen of him in the ship's company. We could raid the whole of Mexico, capture the Spanish fleets and attack Europe."

"This Señor Zorro must be quite some man," Sanchez observed.

"I have heard but little, but enough to convince me that I would have him for a friend rather than an enemy. He is a sort of devil. Now he is here and now he is gone. Like a ghost he comes and like a specter he disappears. Ha! You, a pirate, cross yourself!"

"I am afraid of no live man who lives, save perhaps yourself," Sanchez observed. "But I like not this talk of ghosts."

"Here is the jest, fool and friend! It develops after a time that this terrible Señor Zorro is nothing but a *caballero* out to have a bit of fun and protect the weak. There is a waste of time for you—protecting the weak. And other sundry *caballeros* joined hands with him and punished minor officials who sought to steal and deal crookedly. That is right and proper. If a thief, be a thief! If a pirate, be a pirate! But do not play at being an honest man and try to be thief and pirate at the same time."

"Ha!" Sanchez grunted, meaning that he wished the sermon to end and the tale to continue.

"This Señor Zorro, whose real name I have forgotten if ever I knew it, carved his initial with his sword into the cheeks and foreheads of many men. They call it the Mark of Zorro. And when his identity was disclosed his friends stood by him and told the Governor that it were best if he return to San Francisco de Asis and grace Reina de Los Angeles with his continual absence."

"And did he?"

"He did," Barbados replied, "with hatred in his heart for this same Reina de Los Angeles. He did not abdicate, of course. And he craves revenge."

"Ha! Here is where we enter?"

"It is," Barbados replied. "We raid the town and take what we will, and the Governor hears of it, sends soldiers running wildly up and down the coast, and winks at himself in his looking-glass. For the information and protection we get, we hand to the Governor's man at a certain time and place a certain share of the loot. Which we well can afford, since we are to get it so easily."

"If we forget to hand it—" Sanchez began.

"Friend and fool! By the saints! Are you an honest pirate or no? We shall deal fairly. Think of the future. It is not only Reina de Los Angeles. There is San Juan Capistrano, and rich San Diego de Alcala to come after. By that time we have this pretty Governor and certain of his officials in our mesh, and do as we will. Ha! What

knaves! I would rather be an honest pirate than a politician any day!"

The day passed and the dusk came. And once yet again Barbados indulged in curses. For it was a beautiful moonlight night, half as light as the day that had just died, and a man could be seen afar. But Barbados led his wretched company on toward the town, and after a time they came to the crest of a slope and saw lights twinkling in the distance.

Stretched on the ground so as not to form a silhouette against the sky, Barbados looked over the scene. He could see the plaza, fires burning before the huts of the natives, twinkling lights in the windows of the pretentious houses where lived the men of wealth and blood and rank. To one side was the *presidio*, and to the other the church.

Barbados grunted an order to Sanchez and crept forward alone. He approached the end of the village, reached a spot where the shadows were deep, and crouched to wait.

For half an hour he waited, grumbling his impatience. Then there came to him a figure muffled in a long cloak. Barbados hissed a word that had been agreed upon. The figure stepped quickly to his side.

"You are ready?"

"Ready, *señor*," Barbados replied.

"Where are your men?"

"In hiding three hundred yards away, *señor*."

"It were best to strike in about an hour. The soldiers will be sent toward the south on a wild goose chase."

"I understand, *señor*."

"I ride back toward the hills to a *hacienda* to pay a social call. It would not do for me to be here, of course."

"Certainly not, *señor*."

"The way will be open to you. Take your will with the town, but do not use the torch, except it be on the hut of some native. As soon as you have your loot, make for the sea again. The soldiers will be sent on a useless trail."

"It is well arranged, *señor*. We'll strike as soon as the troopers are at a sufficient distance."

"There is something else. You must

send a few men of your force to the *hacienda* of Don Carlos Pulido, three miles to the north."

"What is this, *señor*?" Barbados asked.

"A little matter of abducting a woman for me."

"Ha!"

"The *Señorita Lolita Pulido*, understand. She is to be seized and conducted to the coast and taken aboard ship. She is not to be harmed, but treated with every respect. In four or five days I shall meet you at the rendezvous on the southern coast, and claim her as my share of the loot. Do this well, and that is all the share of loot I ask this time."

"A mere detail," Barbados said.

"If the *hacienda* is disturbed a bit during the abduction, it will not cause the heartbreak of the Governor. This Don Carlos Pulido is no friend of His Excellency."

"I understand, *señor*."

"The *señorita* expects to become the bride-to-morrow of Don Diego Vega—curse him! That large house at the side of the plaza is his. When you are raiding the town, Barbados, pay special attention to that house. And should he get a knife between his ribs there will be no sorrow on my part."

"I begin to comprehend," Barbados replied.

"I may depend upon you?"

"*Si, señor!* We attend to the house of this Don Diego Vega and to the don personally. I shall send a small force to abduct the girl and take her to the shore. She will be waiting for you at the rendezvous to the south."

"Good! Watch when the soldiers ride away, and strike an hour later. *Adios!*"

The cloak dropped for a moment as the man from the village straightened himself. Barbados got a good look at his face as the moonlight struck it. He gasped.

"Your forehead!" he said.

"It is nothing. That cursed beast of a Zorro put it there!"

Barbados looked again. On the man's forehead was a ragged "Z," put there in such a manner that it would remain forever. There was a moment of silence, and

then Barbados found himself alone. The other had slipped away through the shadows.

Barbados grinned. "Here is a double deal of some sort, but it need bring me no fear," he mused. "Here would be startling news for all men to know. Wants to steal a girl now, does he? For his share of proper loot I'd steal him half a score of girls!"

He grinned again and started back toward his men. Barbados did not fear the soldiers, and he knew they would be sent away. He could be sure of that. For the conspirator who had come to him out of the dark was none other than Captain Ramón, *commandante* of the *presidio* at Reina de Los Angeles.

CHAPTER II.

PEDRO THE BOASTER.

SERGEANT PEDRO GONZALES, a giant of a wine-guzzling soldier whose heart was as large as his capacity for liquor, was known as "Pedro the Boaster." When there were military duties to be done he was to be found at his post in the *presidio*, but at other times one found him at the village *posada*, sitting before the big fireplace and remaking the world with words.

On this moonlight night, Sergeant Pedro Gonzales crossed the plaza with a corporal and a couple of soldiers, entered the inn, and called in a loud voice for the landlord to fetch wine and be quick about it. The sergeant had learned long since that the fat landlord held him in terror, and did he but act surly and displeased he received excellent service.

"Landlord, you are as fat as your wine is thin!" Sergeant Pedro declared, sprawling at one of the tables. "I have a suspicion now and then that you keep a special wineskin for me, and mix water with my drink."

"Señor!" the landlord protested.

"We honest soldiers are stationed here to protect you from liars and thieves and dishonest travelers up and down El Camino Real, and you treat us like the dirt beneath your boots."

"Señor! I have the greatest respect—"

"One of these fine days," Gonzales interrupted, "there will be trouble. Some gentleman of the highway will approach you with an idea of robbery, and you'll shriek for the soldiery. And then, fat one, I may remember the watered wine, and be busy elsewhere!"

"But I protest—" the landlord began.

"More wine!" the sergeant shouted. "Must I get out my blade and carve your wineskins—or your own skin? More wine of the best, and you'll get your pay when I get mine, if it is an honest score you keep. If my friend, Don Diego Vega, was here—!"

"That same friend of yours makes merry a little later in the evening," the landlord said, as he went to fill the wine cups. "To-morrow he is to take a bride."

"Fig, do you suppose I do not know it?" Gonzales screeched. "Think you that I have been asleep these past few months? Was I not in the thick of it when Don Diego Vega played at being Señor Zorro?"

"You were in the thick of it," the corporal admitted, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"Ha!" cried the sergeant. "There was a turbulent time for you! Here in this very room I fought him, blade to blade, thinking that he was some stinking highwayman. And just as I was getting the better of it—"

"How is this?" the corporal shrieked.

"Just as I was getting the better of the blade match," Gonzales reaffirmed, glaring at the corporal, "back he went and dashed through the door! And thereafter he set the town about its own ears for some time to come."

"It occurs to me that I saw that fight," the corporal declared. "If you were getting the best of it at any stage, then were mine eyes at fault."

"I know a man," said the sergeant, darkly, "who will do extra guard duty for a score of days."

"Ha!" the corporal grunted. "You do not like plain speech!"

"I do not like a soldier to make mock of his superiors," the sergeant replied. "It were unseemly for me to make remarks, for instance, concerning our *commandante*,

Captain Ramón, but let it be said that he fought this Señor Zorro, too. And Captain Ramón wears on his forehead Zorro's mark. You will notice that there is no carved Z on my face!"

"Ha!" the corporal grunted again. "It were best, sergeant, to voice such remarks inwardly. The *commandante* is not proud of the mark he wears."

Gonzales changed the subject. "The wine!" he thundered. "It goes well on a moonlight night, the same as on a stormy one. But moonlight is a poor business save for lovesick swains. 'Tis no night for a soldier. Would one expect thieves to descend through the moonlight?"

"There be pirates," the corporal said.

"Pirates!" Gonzales's great fist descended and met the table with a crash, sending the wine cups bouncing. "Pirates! You have noticed no pirates in Reina de Los Angeles, have you? They have not been playing around the *presidio*, have they? I am not saying that they know I am stationed here, however—Meal mush and goat's milk! Pirates is my dish!"

"The town grows wealthy, and they may come," the corporal said.

"You fear? You tremble?" Gonzales cried. "Are you soldier or *fray*? Pirates! By the saints, I would that they came! My sword arm grows fat from little use."

"Talk not of pirates!" the landlord begged. "Suppose they did come?"

"And what if they did?" Gonzales demanded. "Am I not here, dolt? Are there not soldiers? Pirates? Ha!"

He sprang to his feet, those same feet spread wide apart. His hand darted down, and he whipped out his blade.

"That for a pirate!" he shouted, and made a mighty thrust at the wall. "This for a pirate!" And he slashed through the air, his blade whistling so that the corporal and soldiers sprang backward, and the four or five natives who happened to be in the inn cringed in a corner. "Pirates!" cried Gonzales. "I would I could meet one this very night! We grew stale from inaction. There is too much peace in the world! Meal mush and goat's milk!"

The door opened suddenly. Sergeant

Gonzales stopped in the middle of a sentence, and his blade stopped in the middle of an arc. And then the sergeant and the other soldiers snapped to attention, for the *commandante* was before them.

"Sergeant Gonzales!" Captain Ramón commanded.

"*Sí!*"

"I could hear you shouting half way across the plaza. If you wish to meet a pirate, perhaps you may have your wish. Rumors have been brought by natives. Mount your men and proceed along El Camino Real toward the south. Search the country well, once you are four or five miles from the town. It is a bright moonlight night, and men may be seen at a great distance."

"It is an order!" the sergeant admitted.

"Leave but one man at the *presidio* as guard. Return before dawn. Have my best horse made ready, as I ride out to a *hacienda* for a visit. Go!"

"*Sí!*" Sergeant Gonzales grunted. He motioned to the soldiers, and they hurried through the door. He sheathed his sword, and when the back of Captain Ramón was turned for an instant he tossed off the wine that had been before him, and hurried after his men. The *commandante* drew off his gloves and sat at one of the tables.

Gonzales led the way across the plaza and toward the *presidio*. He was growling low down in his throat.

"This is a fine state of affairs!" he said. "Ride all night and kick up the dust! Back before dawn with nothing done!"

"But you wanted pirates," the corporal protested.

"Think you they will stand in the middle of El Camino Real and await our pleasure?" Gonzales growled. "What pirate would be abroad a night like this? Could we but meet some—ha! There is a special reward for pirates!"

Even before they had reached the entrance of the *presidio*, he began shouting his orders. Torches flared, and men ran to prepare the horses. Fifteen minutes later, with Gonzales at their head, they rode across the plaza and out upon El Camino Real, their mounts snorting, their sabers rattling.

From the crest of a slope a few hundred yards away, Barbados and his evil crew watched them depart upon their mounts.

CHAPTER III.

SUDDEN TURMOIL.

WHILE the blushes played across her cheeks, Señorita Lolita Pulido sat at one end of the big table in the great living-room of her father's house and watched the final preparations for her wedding.

Don Carlos, her gray-haired father, watched proudly from the foot of the table. Doña Catalina, her mother, walked majestically around the room and gave soft commands. Native servants scurried like rats in and out of the great room, carrying bundles of silks and satins, gowns, intimate garments.

"To-morrow!" Don Carlos sighed, and in the sign was that which spoke of cruelties bravely borne. "To-morrow, *señorita*, you become the bride of Don Diego Vega, and the first lady of Reina de Los Angeles. And my troubles, let us hope, are at an end."

"Let us hope so," said Doña Catalina.

"The Governor himself dare not raise his hand against the father-in-law of Don Diego Vega. My fortunes will increase again. And you, daughter of my heart, will be a great lady, with wealth at your command."

"And love also," the little *señorita* said, bowing her head.

"Love, also!" said Doña Catalina.

"Ha!" Don Carlos cried, with a gale of laughter. "It is love now, is it? And when first Don Diego came wooing, the girl would have none of him, even to better the family fortunes. He was dull, he yawned, and she wanted a man of hot blood and romantic. But when it was learned that he was Señor Zorro— That made a difference! Love, also! It is well!"

Señorita Lolita blushed again, and fumbled at a soft garment upon her lap. There came a pounding at the door, and one of the servants opened it. Don Carlos glanced up to find a man of the village there.

"It is a message, *señor*," he said.

"From whom?" Don Carlos asked.

"From Don Diego Vega, to the little *señorita*."

Señorita Lolita dimpled, and her black eyes flashed as she bent over the heap of garments again. Don Carlos stood up and stalked majestically toward the door.

"I take the message," he said, and he took it, and handed it to Doña Catalina, that she might read it first. "Don Diego Vega is not wed to my daughter as yet. It is not proper that he send her sealed messages."

His eyes were twinkling as he turned away. Señorita Lolita pouted and pretended indifference, and Doña Catalina, her mother, unfolded the message, and read it with a smile upon her lips.

"It is harmless," she announced.

Señorita Lolita looked up, and took the message from her mother's hand. Don Diego Vega, it appeared, wasted no words. His message was read swiftly:

This man has orders to make a record carrying this greeting of love to you and fetching yours in return.

Thine, DIEGO.

"Ha!" Don Carlos shouted. "Economy is a great thing, but not in words when there is love to be spoken. You should have seen the messages I sent to Catalina in the old days!"

"Carlos!" Doña Catalina warned.

"And paid a native wench royally to slip them to her," Don Carlos continued, shamelessly. "Behind the back of her *duenna*! Page after page, and every word a labor! I could fight better than I could write!"

"Perhaps so can Don Diego," the little *señorita* said.

"Staunch and loyal to him, are you?" Don Carlos roared. "That is proper. Pen your reply, my daughter, and let this man establish his record for the return trip to Reina de Los Angeles. Do not keep Don Diego waiting."

The *señorita* blushed yet again, got up, and swept into a room adjoining.

Don Carlos addressed the messenger: "How are things in the town?"

"Don Diego entertains his *caballero* friends at a last bachelor supper, *señor*," the man replied.

"Ha! Young men only, I suppose?"

"*Sí, señor!*"

"Wine flows, I take it, and the table is piled high with rich food?"

"*Sí, señor!*"

"Ah, well! I shall have my turn to-morrow at the marriage feast," Don Carlos said. "My regards to Don Diego Vega!"

"They shall be given him, *señor*."

The *señorita* returned and handed what she had written to her mother, who perused it and sealed it, and handed it to the messenger in turn. The man bobbed his head in respectful salute, and hurried out. A native servant closed the door behind him—but neglected to drop the heavy bar in place. Because of the unusual excitement, none noticed.

Don Carlos resumed his position at the foot of the table. This was a great night for him, and to-morrow would be a great day. He was happy because his fortunes were on the mend, because the Governor had been forced to cease his persecutions. But he was happy also because his daughter was to have happiness.

Don Carlos and his wife had lavished upon this, their only child, love enough for a dozen. And now both glanced at her as she fumbled at a silken shawl. Her black eyes were sparkling again, though dreams were glistening in them. Her cheeks were delicately flushed. Her dainty hands played with the silks. One tiny tip of a boot peeped from beneath her voluminous skirts. A bride of whom any man could honestly be proud, Don Carlos thought, and with proper blood in her veins and proper thoughts in her head.

"So Don Diego makes merry to-night with his young friends!" Don Carlos said. "I would like to peer in upon him now."

Could he have done so, he would have seen a merry gathering. In the big living-room of Don Diego's town *casa* a huge table had been spread. Don Diego sat at the head of it, dressed in fastidious garments, and *caballeros* were grouped around it. Richly dressed they were, with blades at their sides, blades with jeweled hilts, but

serviceable weapons for all that. Wine cups and dishes were before them. They feasted, and they drank. They toasted Don Diego, and the *Señorita Lolita*, Don Diego's father, and the *señorita's* father, and one another.

"Another good man gone wrong!" cried Don Audre Ruiz. He sat at Don Diego's right hand, because he was Don Diego's closest friend. "Here is our comrade, Don Diego, about to turn into a family man!" he continued. "This scion of Old Spain, this delicate morsel of *caballero* blood to be gobbled up by the monster of matrimony! It is time to weep!"

"Into your wine cup!" Don Diego added.

"Ha!" Don Audre Ruiz cried. "But a few days ago, it seems, we rode after him as though he had been the devil, rode hard upon his heels, thinking that we were following some sort of renegade *caballero* playing at highwayman. *Señor Zorro*, by the saints! We shouted praises of him because for a time he took us out of our monotony. Then came the unmasking, and we found that Don Diego and *Señor Zorro* were one and the same!"

He ceased speaking long enough to empty his wine cup and make certain that a servant refilled it.

"*Señor Zorro!*" he continued. "Those were happy moments! And now he is to turn husband, and no more riding abroad with sword in hand. We shall die of monotony, Diego, my friend!"

"Of fat!" Don Diego corrected.

"What has become of the wild blood that coursed your veins for a few moons?" Don Audre Ruiz demanded. "Where are those precious, turbulent drops that were in *Zorro*?"

"They linger," Don Diego declared. "It needs but the cause to churn them into active being."

"Ha! A cause! *Caballeros*, let us find him a cause, that this good friend of ours will be too busy to get married."

"One moment!" Don Diego cried. He stood up and smiled at them, gave a little twitch to his shoulders, and then turned his back upon the brilliant company and hurried from the room. They drank again,

and waited. And after a time, back he came, a silk-draped bundle beneath one arm.

"What mystery is this?" Don Audre demanded. He sprawled back in his chair and prepared to laugh. It was said of Don Audre that he always was prepared to laugh. He laughed when he made love, when he fought, as he ate and drank, his bubbling spirit always upon his lips.

"Here is no mystery," Don Diego Vega declared. He smiled at them again, unwrapped what he held, and suddenly exhibited a sword. "The blade of Zorro!" he cried.

There was an instant of silence, and then every *caballero* sprang to his feet. Their own swords came flashing from their scabbards, flashed on high, reflected in a million rays the glowing lights of the candelabra.

"Zorro!" they shouted. "Zorro!"

"Good old blade!" Don Diego said, a whimsical smile playing about his lips.

"Good old point!" exclaimed Don Audre Ruiz. "With it you marked many a scoundrel with your mark, notably and especially one Captain Ramón. Why do we endure his presence here in Reina de Los Angeles? Why not force the Governor to send him north?"

"Let us not mar a perfect evening with thoughts of him," Don Diego begged. "*Caballeros*, I have brought this blade before you for a purpose. We have drunk toasts to everything of which we could think, and there still remains an abundance of rare wine that has not been guzzled. A toast to the sword of Zorro!"

"Ha! A happy thought!" Don Audre Ruiz cried. "*Caballeros*, a toast to the sword of Zorro!"

They drank it, put down their golden goblets, and sighed. They glanced at one another, each thinking of the days when Señor Zorro had ruled El Camino Real for a time. And then they dropped into their chairs once more, and Don Diego Vega sat down also, the sword on the table before him.

"It was a great game," he said, and sighed himself. "But it is in the past. Now I shall be a man of peace and quiet."

"That remains to be seen," Don Audre declared. "There may be domestic warfare, you know. A man takes a terrible chance when he weds."

"Nothing but peace and quiet," Don Diego responded. "The sword of Zorro is but a relic. Years from now I may look upon it and smile. It has served its purpose."

He yawned.

"By the saints!" Don Audre Ruiz breathed. "Did you see him? He yawned! While yet the word 'Zorro' was upon his lips, he yawned. And this is the man who defended persecuted priests and natives, defied the soldiery and made the Governor do a dance! 'Tis a cause he wants and needs, something to change him into Zorro again!"

"To-morrow I become a husband," Don Diego answered him, yawning yet once more and fumbling with a handkerchief. "By the way, *señores*, have you ever seen this one?"

He spread the handkerchief over the wine goblet before him, and as the *caballeros* bent forward to watch, smiles upon their faces, he passed one hand rapidly back and forth across the covered goblet with such rapidity that it was hidden almost all the time, and with the other hand he reached beneath the edge of the handkerchief and jerked the goblet away, letting it drop to the floor. The handkerchief collapsed on the table. Don Diego waved a hand languidly.

"See? It is gone!" he breathed.

"Bah!" Don Audre cried as the others laughed. "At your boy's tricks again, are you? Where is your wild blood now?"

"I am done with roistering and adventure."

"A man never knows when his words may be hurled back at him and cause him to look foolish," said Don Audre. "It is foolish to take everything for granted. For instance—"

He stopped. The sounds of a tumult had reached their ears. For a moment they were silent, listening. Shouts, oaths, the sounds of blows, the clashing of blades

"What in the name of the saints is that?" Don Diego asked.

A trembling servant answered him.

"There are men fighting over by the

inn, *señor*," he said. "I heard some one shout of pirates!"

CHAPTER IV.

FRAY FELIPE MAKES A VOW.

BARBADOS continued to mutter curses as he watched the sky. Not a cloud marred its face, and the moon was at the full. But here was an enterprise where there was small risk, so he could discount the bright night.

He grunted his pleasure as he saw Sergeant Gonzales and the troopers ride away from the *presidio*, cross the plaza, and continue toward the south. He called Sanchez to him and explained what was to be done at the *hacienda* of Don Carlos Pulido.

"You will take half a dozen men," Barbados commanded. "Do as you please at the place, but capture the *señorita* by all means, and go quickly back over the hills to the mouth of the cañon. Steal horses, and ride. Get there before the break of day! We shall do the same. The ship will be putting in at dawn or before."

"*Si!*" Sanchez replied. "And do you care for my share of the loot here. There may be small profit at the *hacienda!*"

Sanchez selected his ruffians and led them away around a hill and toward the north, where the *hacienda* of Don Carlos Pulido rested. Barbados whispered instructions to the remainder of the crew. And then they waited, for Barbados wished to make sure that the soldiers did not return.

For more than an hour longer he waited, and then gave the word. Down from the crest of the slope they slipped, breathing heavily, lusting for illegal gain, holding their cutlasses in readiness for instant use. They kept in the scant shadows as much as possible, scattered as they crossed the wider light spaces, made their way slowly to the edge of the town.

There, in the shadows cast by an empty adobe building, they separated, and Barbados whispered his final instructions. They were to look for rich loot, and nothing bulky. He had decided against food and wine, bolts of cloth, casks of olives and jars of honey. Such things could be ob-

tained later at any *hacienda*. Just now he wished to get portable valuables and hurry back to the coast.

Men were detailed to seize horses and have them in readiness. Certain large houses were to be attacked in force after the smaller ones had been disposed of. The inn was to receive special attention, since it was whispered that the fat landlord had hidden wealth.

Down upon the town they crept, and suddenly they charged into the plaza from either side. Into the inn they poured, cutting and slashing at natives until they fled screeching with terror, stabbing at the fat landlord as he called upon the saints.

They took what the landlord had, and gave their attention to the houses and shops. And now bedlam broke loose as it was realized what was taking place. Doors were smashed, terrified men and women were driven from room to room. Things of value were seized. Jewels were ripped from dainty throats and delicate fingers. Silken shawls were torn from beautiful shoulders.

Here and there a man gave fight, but not for long. The pirates outnumbered the citizens, because they traveled in force and the citizens were scattered. Shrieks and screeches and cries stabbed the air. Raucous oaths and fiendish laughter rang across the plaza. And above the din roared the voice of Barbados, the human fiend, as he ordered his men, commanded them, admonished them, led them to an easy victory.

It was quick work, because the descent had been so unexpected. It might have continued throughout the night, until the town was stripped bare, until not a native's hut was left standing. But Barbados wanted quick loot and a get-away. He wanted to reach the coast during the bright moonlight, get the planks of the ship's deck beneath his feet once more. He trusted Captain Ramón, but he feared that the soldiers might return.

Across the plaza the pirates charged, with Barbados at their head. They broke into the church. They filled the sacred edifice with oaths and ribald jest and raucous laughter. They darted here and there, torches held high above their heads, searching for articles of worth.

From a little room to one side stepped a *fray*. His hair was silver, his face was calm. Erect and purposeful he stood, looking across at them. Quick steps forward he took toward the altar, where there were relics he loved.

"What do you here, *señores*?" he demanded.

His voice seemed soft, yet at the same time there was the ring of steel in it. They stopped, their shouting ceased, there was a moment of silence.

"Who are you?" one shouted.

"I am called Fray Felipe, *señores*," came the response. "Just now I am in charge of this house of worship. How is it that you so far forget yourselves as to bring your tumult here?"

"*Fray*?" one shouted. "Fool and *fray*? Why do we bring our tumult here? For to get loot, gowned one!"

"Loot?" Fray Felipe thundered, taking another step forward. "You would profane this house? You would lay sacriligious hands on what is to be found here, even as you have voiced sacriligious tones within these walls? Scum of the earth, begone!"

They surged toward him. "One side, *fray*!" shouted a foremost one. "Respect the black flag and we respect your gown!"

"Spawn of hell! Sons of the devil!" Fray Felipe thundered. "Back to the door, and out of this holy place!"

He scarcely hoped to stop them. There were rich ornaments on the altar, and in the uncertain light the torches shed he could see the eyes of those nearest glittering. And the gem-studded goblet was there!

Thought of the gem-studded goblet gave new strength to ancient Fray Felipe. It was a relic highly prized. Fray Felipe loved it, and cared for it tenderly. There was a legend connected with it. Once it had been touched by a saint's lips, men had said. To have this scum as much as touch the sacred goblet was too much—to have them steal it would be unthinkable.

Once more they surged forward, and Fray Felipe sprang before the altar and threw up his hands in a gesture of command.

"Back!" he cried. "Would you damn beyond recovery your immortal souls? Would you commit the unpardonable sin?"

"Ha!" shouted a man in the front of the throng. "Worry not about our souls, *fray*! One side, else you'll have a chance to worry about the state of your own! We have scant time to spend on a *fray*!"

"What would you?" Fray Felipe asked.

"Loot, fool of a *fray*!"

"Only over my dead body do you take it! I am not afraid to die to protect holy things! But you—you will fear to die, if you do this thing!"

"Slit his throat!" cried one in the throng.

"Are we here to argue? The work is not done!"

Once more they surged forward. The light of the torches sent rays of fire shooting from the ornaments on the altar. Their lust for loot consumed them.

Fray Felipe braced himself, seized the nearest, raised him half from the floor, and hurled him back against his fellows.

"The *fray* shows fight!" one cried. "Use your knives, you in the front! A stab between the ribs, and let us go!"

Again they rushed, and Fray Felipe prepared for one more feeble attempt, the one he deemed would be the last. He made the sign of the cross and waited calmly—waited until they were upon him, until he could feel their hot breathing upon his face, until the stench of their perspiration was in his nostrils.

But, even as a man raised a cutlass to strike, there came an interruption. The bel-lowing voice of Barbados rang out above the din.

"Stop!" he shrieked. There was something terrifying in the sudden and unexpected command. The pirates stopped, fell back. Barbados charged through them and to Fray Felipe's side. The pirate's face showed white in the light of the torches.

"Back!" he commanded. "This *fray* is not to be harmed! Out, fools and devils! There is one rich house yet to be robbed. Let us not tarry here!"

"There is loot—" one began.

He did not complete the sentence. Barbados whirled, and with a single blow he stretched him senseless.

"Out!" he commanded. "This *fray* is not to be touched!"

They backed away from him, rushed back

to gather near the door. They did not pretend to understand this, but Barbados was chief, and perhaps he knew what he was doing. They saw him turn, knew that he spoke to the *fray*, but could not make out his words.

"I had no doing in this," Barbados said. "I assault no *fray* nor priest! I stopped them in time. Had I not remained outside a moment to watch affairs I would have stopped them before."

"You are not wholly bad," Fray Felipe said.

"I am wholly bad, *fray*—make no mistake about it! But I keep my hands off *frailes* and priests!"

He whirled around and rushed to the door, shrieking at his men. Only the soft light of the candles glowed in the church.

Fray Felipe took a step forward and looked after them. He turned back toward the altar, a look of thankfulness in his face.

And suddenly that look changed! Misery took its place. Fray Felipe gave a little cry of mingled surprise and pain, and tottered forward. The precious gem-studded goblet was gone!

He sensed at once how it had happened. When they had charged upon him, before Barbados came, one of the pirates had snatched the goblet away.

Fray Felipe whirled toward the door again, took half a dozen steps, seemed at the point of rushing after them. But he knew they were on the other side of the plaza now, and that an appeal to them would be useless. However, he could try.

He faced the altar again, and the expression of his old countenance was wonderful to see. And then and there Fray Felipe took a vow.

"I go!" he said. "I return with the saintly goblet, or do not return at all!"

CHAPTER V.

ZORRO TAKES THE TRAIL.

BARBADOS had saved the *casa* of Don Diego Vega for the last. He had kept an eye upon it, however, while his men were looting the town, but had seen nothing to indicate danger from that quar-

ter. And now he remembered Captain Ramón's commands, and it pleased him to carry them out.

Don Diego's was the finest house in the village, and seemed to promise rich loot. Barbados placed four of his men outside to guard against the unexpected return of the soldiers, and led the remainder straight to the front door.

They hesitated there for a moment, gathered closely together, then Barbados gave the word, and they rushed through the door and hurled themselves inside, to go sprawling over the rich rugs and carpets and stop in astonishment and confusion. Barbados swore a great oath as he strove to maintain his balance.

Before them was a wonderful room lavishly furnished. To one side was a wide stairway that led to the upper regions of the house, and priceless tapestries were hanging from a mezzanine. But what engaged the attention of Barbados and his crew the most was the big table in the middle of the room and some score of richly dressed *caballeros* sitting around it.

Here was the unexpected, which Barbados always feared. He came to a stop, thrust forward his head, and his little eyes began glittering. The soldiers were gone from the town, but here were a score of young *caballeros* who were fully as good as soldiers in a fight, and who loved fighting. Barbados had seen such young blades handle swords and rapiers before.

The entrance of the pirates had followed closely upon the announcement of their presence in the town to Don Diego by the servant. And when they tumbled through the door, showing their evil faces in the strong light, the *caballeros* struggled to get to their feet, reaching for their blades, the smiles swept from their faces and expressions of grim determination showing there instead. But the calm voice of Don Diego quieted them.

"Ha!" Don Diego said. "What have we here? *Señores*, it is the night before my wedding, and most persons are welcome to partake of my hospitality. But this happens to be a select gathering of my close friends, and I really cannot remember of having sent you invitations."

"Have done!" Barbados bellowed, his voice ringing with a courage he scarcely felt. "Have done, fashionable fop! We are men who sail under the black flag, terrible alike on land and sea!"

Don Diego Vega threw back his head and laughed lightly.

"Did you hear that, Audre, my friend?" he asked Ruiz. "This fellow says that he and his comrades are terrible alike on land and sea."

Don Audre entered into the spirit of the occasion, as he always did. "Diego, I did not know that you were such a wit," he said. "Have you hired these fellows to come here and give us a fright? Ha! It is a merry jest, one that I'll remember to my last day! For a moment I was ready to draw blade."

"Jest, is it?" Barbados cried, lurching forward almost to the foot of the table. "Twill be considered no jest when we have stripped you of your jewels and plaything swords and this house of what valuables it contains! Back up against that wall, señores, and the man who makes a rash move will not live to make another!"

"I have made a multitude of rash moves, and I still live," Don Audre Ruiz told him. "Diego, it is indeed an excellent jest! I give you my thanks!"

"Pirates!" Don Diego said, laughing again. "In reality, I did not hire them to come here and furnish us with this entertainment. But since they have been so kind, it is no more than right that I pay them!" He sprang to his feet, bent forward with his hands upon the table, and glared down the length of it at Barbados. "You are the chief bull pirate?" he asked.

"I am the king of the crew!" Barbados replied. "Back against that wall, you and your friends!"

Don Diego Vega laughed lightly again. And then the laughter fled his face, and his eyes narrowed and seemed to send forth flakes of steel.

"Sí! You must be paid!" he said. "But there are many ways of making payment!"

The sword of Señor Zorro was beneath his hands. And suddenly it was out of its scabbard, and he had sprung upon the table and had dashed down the full length of it,

scattering goblets and plates, drink and food.

Off the other end he sprang, and struck the floor a few feet in front of Barbados, who had recoiled and was struggling to get his cutlass out of his belt. The sword of Zorro flashed through the air, describing a gleaming arc.

"Pirate, eh?" Don Diego Vega cried. "You have come to collect riches, have you, Señor Pirate?"

"What is to prevent?" Barbados sneered. "You and your pretty toy of a sword?"

"Ha! You insult a good blade!" Don Diego cried. "The insult shall not go unpunished! Look you here!"

Don Diego Vega whirled suddenly to one side, his sword seemed to flash fire, and its point bit into a panel of the wall once, twice, thrice! Barbados looked on in amazement, his lower jaw sagging. His little eyes bulged, and he looked again. Scratched on the panel of the wall was a Z.

"That mark!" the pirate gasped. "You are Zorro! That mark—the same the *commandante* wears on his forehead—"

Don Diego had whirled to face him again. "How know you there is such a mark on the forehead of Captain Ramón?" he demanded. "So! The *commandante* deals with pirates, does he? That is how it happens that my friend, Sergeant Gonzales, and his soldiers are not here! Ha!"

Barbados blustered forward, his cutlass held ready, striving to regain the mastery of the situation. "Give us loot, or we attack!" he thundered.

"Attack, fool?" Don Diego cried. "Do you imagine that you hold the upper hand here? Up with your blade!"

The last thing Barbados wished to do was to fight a *caballero* under such circumstances. He had the fear of the mongrel for the thoroughbred. But here was a thing that could not be avoided unless his leadership of the pirates suffer.

The *caballeros* sprang from their chairs, drawing their swords, shouting in keen anticipation of a break in the deadly monotony of their lives. They rushed to the right and the left, and engaged the pirates as they rushed forward. Don Diego Vega found himself at liberty to engage Barbados

only, a thing he relished and which he did with right good will.

Barbados fought like a fiend, mouthing curses, puffing out his cheeks, but he did not understand this style of fighting. Don Diego Vega seemed to be wielding half a dozen blades that sang about his head and threatened to bury themselves in his throat. His cutlass seemed heavy, useless, his strokes went wild.

Back toward the wall went Barbados, while Don Diego grinned at him and taunted him, played with him as a cat does with a mouse.

"Pirate, eh?" Don Diego said. "Terrible on either land or sea? 'Tis a jest, Señor Pirate! A thin jest!"

Barbados sensed that the termination of this combat was not to be to his liking. He got a chance to glance once around the big room. What he saw staggered him. Two of the *caballeros* were stretched on the floor, blood flowing from their wounds. But, aside from those two, the *caballeros* were getting much the better of the combat. The pirates were retreating toward the front door. Their heavy cutlasses were of no avail against flaming, darting light swords, especially when the men who handled those swords refused to stand and be cut down, but danced here and there like phantoms.

But Barbados did not have time to contemplate the scene long. Don Diego Vega pressed his attack. Back against the wall went the pirate chief. He crouched, fought his best. But suddenly he felt a twinge of pain in his wrist, and his cutlass left his hand and shot through the air, to fall with a crash in a corner.

Barbados stared stupidly before him and then came alive to his immediate peril. For Don Diego Vega was standing before him, smiling a smile that was not good to see.

"Payment shall be made!" Don Diego said.

His blade darted up and forward, and Barbados gave a little cry of pain and fear and recoiled. On his forehead, it seemed, was a streak of fire. Again the sword of Zorro darted forth, and there was a second streak of fire, and yet a third time. And then Don Diego Vega took a step backward and bowed mockingly.

"You wear my brand," he said. "It is an honor."

Terror had claimed Barbados for the moment. Now he slipped a short distance along the wall, while Diego followed him, and suddenly he shrieked his commands and darted toward the door. Into the plaza tumbled the pirates, with the *caballeros* at their heels.

Barbados shrieked more commands, and the pirates ran with what speed they had. Those left behind in the plaza gathered the horses they needed and the loot, and those coming from the *casa* of Don Diego rushed toward the horses now. For the greater part, those horses were fine-blooded stock and belonged to Don Diego's guests, mounts used to traveling at a rapid rate of speed between some *hacienda* and the town.

Barbados urged his men to haste. Only compact loot could be carried. They sprang to the backs of the horses and dashed away. The *caballeros* pursued on foot until the plaza had been crossed. And then they stopped and gathered around Don Diego.

"There can be no pursuit," Diego said. "They have made away with your horses, my friends, the soldiers are not here, and the only mounts remaining in town are not fit for *caballeros* to ride."

"Yet they must be pursued," said a voice at his side.

Don Diego whirled to find ancient Fray Felipe standing there.

"They have stolen the sacred goblet," Fray Felipe said in a calm voice. "I have taken a vow to regain it."

"The goblet!" Diego gasped.

"Don Diego, my friend, you will help me in this?" Fray Felipe asked. "I have known you since you were a babe in arms. I have loved you—"

"To-morrow I wed," Don Diego said. "But I shall do everything in my power. We'll get horses as soon as possible and pursue. I'll open my purse, and up and down El Camino Real men will go, seeking where these pirates touch shore again. We'll get the goblet!"

"I have more faith in your sword arm than in your purse, my friend," Fray Felipe said. "But do what you can."

The *caballeros* had gathered now. Men and women were pouring from the houses, telling of what had befallen them. Barbados and his men had been merciful, for pirates. They had taken wealth, but they had taken few lives.

Don Diego Vega started back across the plaza toward his house, his friends around him.

"For a moment I was Señor Zorro again," he said. "Those drops of blood you mentioned grew hot for a time, Audre, my friend."

"Glorious!" Audre Ruiz breathed. "I would we had horses and could follow them—even a ship to follow them out to sea. Don Diego, my friend, your bachelor supper is a great success."

"Then let us return and conclude it," Don Diego said. "We have a couple of wounded friends in the house. Let us attend them."

"Let us bathe their wounds in wine," Audre suggested.

They hurried into the house. The frightened servants came forward again and began putting things to rights. The two wounded *caballeros* were in chairs already, and men working to bandage them. Once more Don Diego sat at the head of the table, and the *caballeros* dropped into their chairs, and the servants made haste to fill the goblets. Don Diego put the sword of Zorro on the table before him and proposed that they toast it again.

There came a sudden commotion at the door, and a man stumbled in. Don Diego was on his feet instantly, for he knew the man. He was a leading workman at the *hacienda* of Don Carlos Pulido. A horrible fear gripped Don Diego's heart.

The man was exhausted. He staggered forward, and would have fallen had not Diego grasped him and braced him against a corner of the table.

"Señor!" he gasped. "Don Diego—young master!"

"Speak!" Diego commanded.

"Pirates attacked the *hacienda* more than an hour ago, while others were attacking here—"

"Tell it quickly!"

"Don Carlos is sorely wounded, señor!

Many of the buildings are burned. The house was looted!"

"The *señorita*?" Don Diego questioned.

"Do not strike me when I speak, young master!"

"Speak!"

"They carried away the *señorita*. They slew six who would have saved her—"

"Carried her away!" Don Diego cried.

"Toward the sea," the man gasped. "I heard one of the pirates shout that she was to be treated gently—that she was to be the prize of some great man—"

Don Diego Vega tossed him aside, and once more the blade of Zorro was in his hand. His friends were upon their feet and crowding forward.

"A rescue!" Don Audre Ruiz cried. "We must save the *señorita*!"

"They have stolen the bride of Don Diego, the fools!" another shouted.

"Worse than that, for them!" Audre screeched. "They have stolen the bride of Señor Zorro!"

Don Diego Vega seemed to recover from the shock.

"You are right, my friends!" he cried. "This is touch enough to turn my blood hot again. Don Diego Vega is dead for a time; Señor Zorro takes the trail! Audre, get me the best horse you can! You others, wait!"

He dashed up the stairs as Audre hurried through the front door. The others waited, talking wildly of plans for reaching the shore of the sea. Frightened servants stood about as though speechless.

In a short space of time Don Diego returned to them. But he was Don Diego no longer. Now he wore the costume he had worn when as Señor Zorro he had ridden up and down the length of El Camino Real. And in his face was a light that was not good to see.

Don Audre hurried in. "I've got one good horse," he said.

"I go!" Don Diego cried. "I follow them to the sea. The two forces will meet there."

"We are with you in this!" Don Audre cried. "With you as when you were Zorro before. With you, my friend, until we have the little *señorita* safe again!"

Their naked blades flashed overhead in token of allegiance.

Don Diego thanked them with a look.

"Then follow me to the sea!" he cried. "A trading ship is due there in the morning. Mayhap we'll have to take it and trace them across the waves. I go! Zorro takes the trail!"

He dashed to the door, the others following. He sprang into the saddle of the mount Don Audre had procured. He drove home the spurs cruelly, and rode like a demon through the bright moonlight and up the slope, then taking the shortest trail to the sea.

CHAPTER VI.

ZORRO STRIKES.

AT the *hacienda* of Don Carlos Pulido the outer door was opened slowly, stealthily. A villainous face showed. Then the door was thrown open wide and half a dozen men stormed into the room. Doña Catalina gave a shriek of fear and sprang backward, and as the little *señorita* rushed to her, clasped her in her arms. Don Carlos looked up quickly from a garment he had been inspecting and sprang to his feet.

"Pirates!" he roared.

The aged don seemed to renew his youth with the cry. He darted back against the wall, shrieking for his servants and his men, his hand darting to the blade that happened to be at his side. But the surprise was complete, and there was no hope of a victory over the pirate crew. Servants rushed in loyally, to be cut down. Doña Catalina and Lolita crouched in a corner, the aged don standing protectingly before them.

Sanchez made for him, seeing the girl. The pirate laughed, attacked like a fiend, and Don Carlos went down before he could give a wound.

Doña Catalina's shriek rang in his ears. Then there came another shriek as Señorita Lolita felt herself being torn from her mother's arms. Sanchez whirled her behind him, and another of the pirates clutched her in his arms.

"Easy with the wench!" Sanchez cried. "She is to be saved for some great man!"

The little *señorita* struggled and fought, her gentleness gone in the face of this emergency. Horror claimed her and almost destroyed her reason. She had heard whispered wild tales of what happened to women captured by pirates.

Out of the house she was carried, shrieking in her fear. The pirates poured out, too. Some of the outbuildings were ablaze now, and the shrieking, swearing crew was looting the house for what valuables could be carried easily.

Men of the *hacienda* came running, to be cut down with a laugh. More huts were set ablaze. Pirates came running from the house, carrying jewels, silks, satins. Señorita Lolita realized dimly that her wedding garments had been ruined by these men.

"Diego!" she moaned. "Diego!"

Horses were procured, her father's bloodied stock, and she was lashed to the back of one. The pirates mounted others, and Sanchez urged them on their way toward the distant sea. He had orders to get there before the dawn, and he feared Barbados too much to disobey his orders.

Señorita Lolita glanced back once, to see flames pouring from the doors and windows of the home she had loved. She thought of the father she had seen cut down, of her tender mother. And then she slumped forward in a swoon, and Sanchez steadied her in the saddle.

Two men of the *hacienda* carried Don Carlos Pulido from his burning home and placed him down at a distance beneath a tree. Doña Catalina knelt beside him, weeping.

"Find a horse!" the aged don commanded one of the men. "Ride like a fiend to the town, and tell Don Diego Vega of this. As you love the *señorita*, spare neither yourself nor your mount! Ride—do not bother with me!"

And so the man found a horse and rode away toward the town, going like the wind, and so the news came to Don Diego Vega.

The *señorita*, coming from her swoon, found that the pirates were traveling at a high rate of speed. Mile by mile they cut

down the distance to the sea. There was an excellent trail used by traders, and Sanchez followed it swiftly.

It was like a nightmare to the little *señorita*. Again she wondered at the fate of her father and her mother. Again, mentally, she called upon Don Diego Vega to save her.

But her proud blood had returned to her now. She curled her pretty lips in scorn when Sanchez addressed her, and would make no reply. Her eyes snapped and flashed as she contemplated him. Her tiny chin tilted at an insulting angle. She was a Pulido, and she remembered it. Whatever fate held in store for her, she would be a Pulido to the end.

And finally, after some hours, they rounded a bend of a hill and saw the sea ahead of them, and the mouth of the dark cañon that ran down into it. Sanchez dismounted them beside the curving cliff. The loot was piled on the sand, the horses were turned adrift. *Señorita Lolita* was forced to dismount. Her wrists were lashed behind her, and she was compelled to sit on the ground with her back to the cliff's wall.

Some of the pirates lighted a fire of driftwood. Sanchez stood looking out to sea, watching for the ship that soon would be due.

And then came Barbados and the pirates from the town.

"Fair loot!" Barbados cried as Sanchez questioned. "But we were outdone. Some devilish *caballeros* were having a supper, and we stumbled upon them, twice our number. But we have fair loot! And you have the girl!"

"*Si!* We have the girl!" Sanchez replied.

Barbados walked over to her. "A pretty wench!" he declared. "Small wonder a man wished to have you stolen! Proud, are you? Ha! We'll see what pride you have remaining by the end of the next moon!"

He whirled to look over the camp. "Sanchez," he commanded, "put a sentinel up on top of the cliff. I do not expect pursuit, but it is best to be prepared. I ran across that fiend of a Zorro, and he

marked me. But there are not horses enough left in town for himself and his friends, and he would not dare follow alone. Nevertheless, put a sentinel on the cliff."

Sanchez obeyed. A man mounted to the top. On the level stretch of sand before them they could see his shadow in the moonlight as he paced slowly back and forth. Back and forth he went, while *Señorita Lolita* sat and watched the shadow and shivered to think of what was to come.

Barbados and Sanchez prepared the loot for the ship's boats when they should come. There was an abundance of wine, and the pirates began drinking it. They shouted and laughed and sang, while the little *señorita* shuddered and watched the shadow of the sentinel as it went back and forth, back and forth.

And suddenly she bent forward, for there were two shadows now. Hope sang in her breast. One of the shadows was creeping upon the other.

"Diego!" she breathed. "If it could only be Diego!"

The moon was dropping, was at the point where the shadows were lengthened, grotesque. And suddenly Sanchez gave a cry and pointed to the stretch of sand. Barbados turned to look. The pirates stopped drinking and crowded forward.

There on the sandy stretch a picture was being enacted. They saw the silhouettes of two men fighting, thrusting and slashing at each other. From above came the ringing of blades that met with violence.

The pirates sprang back, tried to look up and ascertain what was taking place there. The shadows disappeared from the sand for a time as the combatants reeled back from the edge of the cliff.

"Above, some of you!" Barbados cried.

They started—and stopped. Down the face of the cliff came tumbling the body of the pirate sentinel. It struck the sand, and Barbados and the others crowded forward to see.

"By the saints!" Barbados swore.

His little eyes bulged. On the cheek of the dead pirate sentinel was a freshly-carved Z.

"Barbados! Look!" Sanchez cried.

He pointed to the body. Fastened to the man's belt with a thorn was a scrap of parchment.

Barbados went forward gingerly and plucked it off. On it were words, evidently traced in blood with the point of a blade. Barbados read them swiftly:

Señores! Have you ever seen this one?

CHAPTER VII.

SEÑOR ZORRO'S DARING.

THERE was a moment of horrified silence, during which nothing was heard save the soft lap of the sea against the shore and the labored breathing of the terrified pirates. And then Barbados swore a great oath and looked toward the summit of the cliff once more.

"'Tis that cursed Señor Zorro, the land pirate!" he shrieked. "Spit upon him! After him, dogs! Bring me his heart on the end of a cutlass blade! Or fetch him alive, if you can, that we may have the keen pleasure of killing him slowly."

Some of the pirates already were struggling to get up the narrow path that led to the top of the cliff, slipping and falling back as the soft soil and gravel rolled beneath their feet.

Sanchez started with them, eager for combat. Barbados, however, lingered behind, seeing to the loot and his fair prisoner. He was very busy about it, for he was not eager to join the others and run chances of matching blades with Señor Zorro again.

Barbados remembered well how he had felt during the fight in the house of Don Diégo in Reina de Los Angeles, when he had realized fully that Don Diego was merely playing with him and could have silenced him forever when he willed.

The pirates reached the summit finally, but could see nothing there save a few clumps of brush and a few stunted trees that looked grotesque in the bright light of the moon. They examined the shadows carefully, but located no man. Yet from the near distance came a ringing, a mocking laugh.

They would have pursued, but Barbados

hailed them from below, ordering them down to the beach again. The boats were putting in from the ship.

Down to the strand they tumbled, getting ready to store away their loot. They did not bother about the dead pirate, since he was an ordinary fellow who did not count. They guzzled more wine, ran down into the surf to help drag the boats ashore, greeted their fellows, laughed and shouted and jested and cursed in raucous tones.

Barbados turned to where the Señorita Lolita was sitting with her back against the cliff wall, her tiny wrists lashed behind her. She raised her face and looked at him bravely, her black eyes snapping, her lips curled in scorn.

"This Señor Zorro, I have been given to understand, has some concern in you," Barbados said.

"If he has, Señor Pirate, it is time for you to feel afraid," she replied.

"Think you that I fear the fellow? Ha!"

"He is no fellow! He is a *caballero* with the best of blood flowing in his veins, if you can understand what that means—you, who have the blood of swine in yours!"

"By my naked blade!" Barbados swore. "Were you not to be saved for a great man, I'd punish you well for that remark, proud one! Pride of blood, eh? Ha! 'Tis a thing you will be willing to forget, and eager, within a moon's time. When this man of whom I speak—"

"Is it necessary to speak at all to me?" the little *señorita* wanted to know.

Barbados snorted his anger and disgust. For a moment he turned away to issue a volley of commands to the men who were loading the boats. He berated Sanchez for being slow. He glanced up the face of the cliff once more, as though expecting Señor Zorro to come rushing down, deadly sword in hand. Presently he called two of his men to him.

"Take the wench to one of the boats!" he commanded. "Keep her wrists lashed. Make certain that she does not hurl herself into the sea. These high-born wenches have some queer ideas and are not to be trusted at a time such as this."

The two men grasped her roughly and forced her to her feet. The *señorita* gave a little cry, more because of her injured dignity than from pain or fear. Barbados whirled toward them again, anger in his face.

"Easy with the wench!" he commanded. "She is a proper and valuable share of the loot. If she is delivered in good condition then do we share greater in the other things."

Down to the edge of the hissing surf they went, Señorita Lolita Pulido forced along between them. She still held her head proudly, but the light of the dying fire reflected in her face showed a trace of glistening tears that could not be choked back. Still, she had some hope. Don Diego was near at hand! He already had demonstrated his presence. And he would not entirely desert her while he lived. He could be expected to play Señor Zorro now to the end of the chapter.

They lifted her, carried her between them, and put her down into one of the boats. She sat at one side of a middle seat, a wide thwart. Her bound wrists were over the side, and by turning slightly she could see the tossing water less than two feet below her, for the craft was heavily loaded.

The pirates tumbled into the boat and picked up the oars. One thrust her cruelly against the side. Barbados himself sprang in last of all and ordered his men to give way. The other boats prepared for the start also.

On the summit of the cliff Don Diego Vega crouched and watched them. But he was not the easy-going, fashionable, nonchalant Don Diego now. His eyes were narrowed and piercing. His lips were set in a thin, straight line. Don Diego had vanished, and in his place was Señor Zorro, the Fox, the man who had ridden up and down El Camino Real to avenge the wrongs of *frailes* and natives. And Señor Zorro would know how to deal with this grievous wrong, which touched him personally.

The pirate craft was anchored close inshore. It would not take long for the boats to reach her. The moon was sinking and soon would be gone. There would be

but a brief period of darkness before the dawn came stealing across the land to the sea.

His *caballero* friends were far behind him, he knew. And they would make for the trading schooner anchored a few miles away, perhaps, instead of coming here. And Señorita Lolita Pulido was in the hands of the pirates, and expected to be rescued.

Señor Zorro realized these things even as he watched the pirates preparing to launch their boats. It did not take him long to make a decision. He crawled backward a short distance, sprang to his feet, and ran to the edge of the cliff in a little cove a few yards away, a spot the pirates could not see from their boats.

He made certain that his sword was fast in its scabbard. He tightened his belt. He went to the edge and glanced down at the hissing sea a score of feet below, where it rolled and eddied in a deep pool close to the rocks.

Back he went again. And suddenly he darted forward, took off at the very edge, and curved gracefully through the moonlight in a perfect dive.

He struck the water and disappeared, but in a moment he was at the surface, and swimming away from the treacherous shore. And he found that it was treacherous and the tide an enemy. It pulled at him to drag him down. He fought and struggled against it, and finally won to safety.

The boats were just starting from the land. Señor Zorro, low in the water, swam as though in a contest for a prize, straight toward the nearest of the boats, which was the one in which the *señorita* was sitting a captive.

Señorita Lolita was struggling now to be brave. The pirates were singing their ribald songs and indulging in questionable jests. They swore as they tugged at the oars, cursed the heavy load of loot, and blasphemed because of the work they were forced to do.

The *señorita*, remembering her proud blood, had tried to maintain her courage, but now she felt it ebbing swiftly. There seemed to be no hope. She could not believe that Don Diego could come to her rescue in the face of such terrible odds.

Once she gulped and felt herself near to tears. She leaned backward to keep as far as possible from the pirate sitting beside her. The stench of his body and breath was almost more than she could endure.

Now they were halfway to the pirate ship. Lolita had arrived at a decision. She would be no prey for pirates if she could find at hand the means for taking her own life. She remembered what Barbados had said about her being the prize of some great man, and wondered at it a bit. But suppressed terror occupied her mind and kept her from wondering much. Again she leaned backward, and her bound hands almost touched the water over the side.

The pirates, nearing exhaustion, were rowing slowly now, sweeping their long oars in unison but without their usual force. And suddenly the Señorita Lolita flinched, and almost cried aloud, then struggled to overcome the shock she had felt. Her hands had been touched.

At first she thought it was some monster of the sea, and then that a cold wave had washed them. But the touch came again, and she knew it for what it was—the touch of another hand.

Another touch—and her cheeks flamed scarlet. The *señorita* had had her hands kissed before, and she knew a kiss when she felt it.

She turned her head slowly, leaning outward, and glanced down. And her heart almost stood still.

For Señor Zorro was there, his face showing just at the surface of the water! Don Diego, her husband-to-be, was there, swimming alongside, smiling up at her,

within a few feet of the pirates who bent their backs and rowed and never thought to look down.

Fear clutched at the *señorita's* heart for an instant—fear for him—yet admiration for his daring, too. Her blood seemed suddenly hot instead of cold. The touch of his lips had been enough to do that.

He dared not speak, of course, though the pirates were shouting and singing. But his lips moved and formed voiceless words, and the *señorita* understood.

"Courage! I'll be near!" he mouthed.

She nodded her head slightly in token that she understood. And Don Diego Vega smiled yet again and sank slowly out of sight beneath the waves.

The boats were almost to the vessel now. The bright moon shipped a last ray across the tumbling sea and sank to rest. On the deck of the pirate craft torches flared suddenly to guide the boats.

They reached the side. Rough hands lifted the *señorita* and forced her to the deck above. Swearing, sweating men commenced handing up the loot. Barbados howled his commands and curses, Sanchez echoing them. To one side the *señorita* was held by the two men who had guarded her on the shore, awaiting disposition by the pirate chief.

"With speed, dogs!" Barbados shrieked, "We must be away before the dawn!"

The entire crew was working amidships, getting in the plunder and the boats. They gave no thought to bow or stern.

And up the anchor chain and into the bow crept a dripping figure, with a cry for vengeance in his heart—and the sword of Zorro at his side!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



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A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

TWO BAMBOO STICKS.

OF all the sad moments that a man under thirty may have seen, surely there is none more tragic than that in which he feels constrained to tell the girl he loves that he is a failure professionally, commercially and financially, and, therefore, is bound in honor to release her from her promise to marry him. If there is anything more humiliating than such a confession it is not easily conceivable.

Of course, in most cases, the girl promptly declines the release. The fact that the self-alleged failure comes to her in such a straightforward way, prepared to sacrifice his life's happiness rather than to keep her waiting until he shall be in a position to offer her a home equal in luxury or comfort to that which she would give up for his sake, proves to her that he is worth waiting for. Women are like that—especially when their hearts really have been set a-quiver by a touch of Eros's wing.

So, when David Carter sought to spoil his evening with Laura Goughlin, only daughter of Dr. Amos Goughlin, world-famous archaeologist, orientalist and explorer, by telling her that he was out of a job and

"broke," and therefore had come to give her freedom, she simply would not take him seriously.

"Ridiculous boy!" was her affectionate reproof. "Just because you felt obliged to resign from that importing firm and have not been able to find a similar position in two weeks, you make up your mind that you have become one of the army of hopeless unemployed. And what do you mean by 'broke'? You haven't lost all your money, have you?"

"Oh, no. Of course I have what my father left me. But the income from the estate is only just large enough to make it essential that I earn at least as much more before I can ask you to become my wife. They paid me a good salary at Lin Wung & Co.'s, and, as an expert in Chinese antiques and curios, I was about to sign a two years' contract with them. Then this trouble came up and I was obliged to leave."

Laura gave him one of her mischievous smiles as she said slowly: "I don't see why you should have taken that on yourself, Dave. You were not responsible for the firm's honor."

"No, but I was for my own," returned Dave decisively. "And when I was asked

to allow a fraud to be perpetrated—the selling of what was supposed to be a rare porcelain of the Ming dynasty, but which I knew to be an imitation of a period several centuries later—it would have made me a party to the deception.”

“Why?”

“Because, as the firm’s expert, I was supposed to have guaranteed the porcelain vase as a Ming product, and the customer would have bought it on my word.”

“Did you tell the customer you believed it an imitation? That must have been rather awkward.”

“I merely said that I could not guarantee its origin.”

“And then?”

Dave shrugged. “The firm lost the sale and I resigned.”

The two were sitting on the piano bench in the homelike living room of Professor Goughlin’s old-fashioned home near Washington Square. Laura had been playing when Dave, after many inward struggles, came over and gave utterance to his self-abnegatory outburst.

There is not overmuch room on a piano bench for two persons, even when one faces the piano and the other sits the other way. But it is convenient for an interchange of confidences. Laura leaned against Dave’s shoulder—perhaps not unaware that thereby she imparted a throbbing warmth to his entire being—while her white fingers rippled over the keys in idle runs and arpeggios.

“I wish you were still dad’s secretary—or, rather, associate,” she murmured wistfully.

“‘Secretary’ is the right word,” declared Dave. “He paid me a salary as such, and I have often thought, since our break, that I may have been presumptuous when I tried to persuade him to have nothing to do with the Nestorian Tablet in Hsian Fu. But really, Laura, my protest was mainly because I feared it might bring harm to you. The Chinese in those old provinces don’t like white ‘barbarians,’ as they call us, and they are no respecters of sex when they think, or pretend to think, they have a grievance.”

“That may be so in those out-of-the-way districts in central and northwest China,

where there are no railroads and where white people seldom go,” said Laura thoughtfully. “But I could not believe it of my boys in the mission in Chinatown. I have more than twenty in my Bible class, and I am sure they love and respect me. They show it in such quaint ways, too. For instance, when they bring me flowers on Sunday, it is always just a single blossom, usually a lily on a long stem. And their deep bow, shading their eyes with one hand, as if dazzled by the light of my countenance! Oh, it’s delicious!”

“H-m! Yes!” grunted Dave. “But do you remember the Chinese in Shensi?”

Laura shivered. “Yes, indeed. That awful night, in the bamboo shack on the outskirts of Hsian Fu, where dad bargained with three evil-looking men for the Nestorian Tablet. Their beady black eyes glistened the way a rat’s will in semidarkness. The rice straw wrapped around the stone was pulled partly away, so that you and dad could examine it by the light of the candles the men held. It was all so unspeakably eerie. I can feel again the soft rush of the moaning night wind through the doorway, and the faint odor of poppies from the great fields we had seen that day, and which I remember you said were again defiantly in full flower, to produce opium, after years of government suppression. Why, Dave, lawlessness was in the very air.” She paused. “The Nestorian Tablet is very valuable, dad says. The Nestorians were missionaries, weren’t they?”

“Yes, and this tablet, which is a wonderful record of what they did in propagating the Christian religion ages and ages ago, dates back eleven or twelve centuries. It is—or was—kept in the Pei Lin, meaning ‘the forest of stone tablets.’ But though the antiquarian value of the tablet was well known to the authorities of Hsian Fu, they paid little attention to it. That was what first put it into your father’s head to borrow it, I believe.”

“Yes, *borrow*, Dave,” put in Laura quickly. “Of course dad wouldn’t *steal* anything—even an old stone no one seemed to care about. He only wanted to make a copy of it for the Metropolitan Museum, and meant to return it to China when that

was done. I've heard him say it has been hard to make a satisfactory replica."

"Yes, I know," nodded Dave. "But he has one now, I understand."

"Yes, the original tablet is in his study. He said at dinner last night he hoped to ship it back to Hsian Fu within a week."

"Glad to hear it," said Dave earnestly. "Those three men that night were members of the Ko Lao Hui, a secret society with as much power and as dangerous in central China as the Camorra is in some parts of Italy. Some of the order had been trailing us for most of our journey from Peking. They could not understand how it was we had a lady with us on such an expedition."

"I could have told them," she said with a smile, "that, because I was interested in a Chinese mission in America, I had always longed to visit China with my father. I came through safely, didn't I?"

"Yes," was Dave's sober assent. "You came through all right." He added tensely, under his breath: "Thank God! But if—"

The door of the room burst open, and a well-built man, with iron-gray hair surmounting a strong scholarly countenance, staggered in and sank on a divan, while he stared about him in the vacant manner of one who might have been rudely awakened from sleep and still was only half conscious.

"Father!" cried Laura. "What is it?"

As she bent over him, taking his cold hands in her warm, soft palms and gazing anxiously into his drawn countenance, his lips moved loosely in an obvious endeavor to speak.

"Father!" she repeated beseechingly.

With an impatient shake of the leonine head, Dr. Amos Goughlin seemed to dispel the paralysis from his lips and tongue, and was able to murmur in a low voice that conveyed anger rather than dismay: "The Nestorian Tablet! It is gone! Stolen!"

"Stolen!" came from David Carter in startled tones. "The Nestorian Tablet! Why, Dr. Goughlin, that would mean—"

"I know exactly what it would mean," testily interrupted the doctor. "It is irreplaceable, and it must be on its way to China within a week."

"A week?"

"Yes. Confound the thing! I have had word from the Governor of Hsian. Strange how those fellows back there find out what we're doing in New York. Anyhow, it's got to be sent back. And now some cheap thief thinks he'll blackmail me. Well, we'll see!"

He had regained control of himself with the celerity that was characteristic of him, and which had helped to make him a great explorer, and rose to his feet with an air of defiance.

As he did so something dropped out of the front of his coat—something that Dave pounced on and turned over in his hands with a look that suggested familiarity with the object.

It was a simple contrivance—two short sticks of bamboo, ingeniously tied together in such a way that the pointed ends were separated from each other by a little more than an inch. On one of the sticks were inscribed a few Chinese characters in India ink.

"What is that?" asked Laura. "Where did it come from?"

"Oh, it's nothing," explained Dave lightly. "Just a Mongolian flute from Shensi. Dr. Goughlin must have accidentally swept it off his table or a shelf as he came out of his study."

But even while he spoke his eyes met the gaze of Dr. Goughlin under his heavy brows. Both had recognized the simple article as one of the devilish instruments of torture with which the dreaded Ko Lao Hui has for centuries maintained discipline and dealt with its enemies in the dark byways of the ancient city of Hsian Fu.

CHAPTER II.

THE KO LAO HUI SPEAKS.

"COME to my study with me, Carter," said Dr. Goughlin curtly, taking the bamboo sticks and scowling at them.

He calmly ignored the fact that, as the result of a dispute arising out of his possession of the Nestorian Tablet—violent on his side and marked by what he called "damned obstinacy" on the part of David

Carter—the young man had, six months previously, ceased to be his secretary. He walked to the door, still tottering slightly, but with his usual dignity, taking it for granted that Dave was following. Then he glanced back and saw that his daughter was coming, too.

"You stay here, Laura!" he commanded. "I want my secretary and no one else. Come on, Carter."

He disappeared, going down the hall that led to his study in the rear of the big, rambling house. Instantly Laura ran to Dave and gently pushed him toward the door.

"Hurry, Dave! You are his secretary again. You heard what he said. He's wanted you all these months, but he's been too proud to ask you. So he just assumes that you never have left him—that you have been his secretary right along."

"You mean that I am automatically reinstated?" asked Dave with a whimsical smile. "Perhaps you're right. I hope you are."

"I *am* right," returned Laura with conviction. "The trouble is you are both such fight cats that neither will yield an inch. Otherwise you would never have parted. Now that this dreadful thing has come about he needs you again. He wouldn't admit it, I suppose, but he needs you badly—and so do I, for his sake. You want to come back, don't you?"

Dave did not answer directly.

"Well, I have a great respect and warm regard for the doctor," he said with his arm around her. "He has behaved like a trump in never interfering with our engagement, as many men would have done after firing me. The stern father and all that sort of thing, you know. Instead, he's allowed me to come here and see you as I did before the row, whether he ever intended to accept me as a son-in-law or not. I suppose he figured that, now I'm out of a decent job, there's no danger. He has lots of everyday gumption, even if he is an F. R. G. S., president of the Oriental Research Society, LL.D., M. A., and all the rest of the scientific and professional alphabet."

"Here! Carter! Dave! Where the devil are you?" roared the doctor. "Come here, I tell you! My study!"

"By jove, I *am* his secretary," laughed

Dave. "Dear old chap! He's got his voice again."

The study was a spacious outbuilding, separate from the house, except for its communication with the hall which ran through the latter from back to front, on the architectural plan so common in planters' residences in the South. There were seven long windows—three on either side and one at the end. The place had originally been a conservatory and "sun parlor" combined. When Laura's mother died, in the girl's childhood, the doctor had gratified a long-entertained wish to turn it into a study, and had used it as such ever since.

"You see, Dave," said the doctor when he had closed the door and pointed to another door at the farther end, leading into the garden, "there is no mystery as to how the thieves got in. It was the easiest thing in the world for them to break the lock of the back gate in the alley and open the outer door of the study."

"But this door is locked and bolted inside," remarked Dave after a brief inspection. "Did you fasten it yourself after the thieves got away? You seemed so dazed when you came into the living room that—"

"I was. They didn't come through the door. That French window over there—look at it."

"I see. It is only about two feet from the ground," said Dave, pushing it open on its hinges. "They took advantage of its being behind you as you sat at your table—that *was* where you sat, eh?"

"Of course!" grunted the doctor. "You've been my secretary long enough to know that I always sit there. The window may have been unlatched. I don't know. Anyhow, a wet handkerchief was pressed over my mouth and nose. That's all I remember, till I realized that the flat packing case over there against the wall had been broken open, and I could see from my chair that the Nestorian Tablet was gone. Then I made my way to the room where you and Laura were."

"And didn't you see the men who came in?"

"Never got a glimpse of them. But it's easy to decide the kind of rascals they were. This lovely toy"—he touched with

a finger-tip the bamboo sticks before him—"you know what this is, Dave?"

The young man shivered slightly. "Of course I know it: the blinder they use in Shensi. The two points are just far enough apart to gouge into the corners of the poor wretch's eyes, and he never sees again. One push is enough. And they call *us* barbarians! It looks as if the Ko Lao Hui had been here."

"That's clear on the face of it. I've had threats from them half a dozen times in the last six months, but the curious thing is that they are contradictory."

"In what way?" asked Dave.

"This!" was Dr. Amos's reply as he pushed the bamboo sticks further away with an expression of disgust. "First there came a ball of red paper thrown through an open window to my desk one evening when I sat here writing by lamplight. The ball struck my hand. I opened it and found a brief order in Shensi characters ordering me to have the tablet back in Hsian Fu within a month. There was a death sign at the bottom."

"You couldn't get a look at the rascal who threw it? But, of course, not." Dave answered his own question. He knew the subtle ways of the Ko Lao Hui.

"The next message came through the post office. It was addressed to me neatly in typewriting, in an ordinary plain envelope, and had been mailed in New York, uptown. The paper inside was red. In Chinese I was warned not to let the Nestorian Tablet out of my hands until I received personal permission from a Ta Ko."

"A lodge master of the Ko Lao Hui," threw in Dave. "Have you his name?"

"No. There is not likely to be more than one of them in New York, so his name is immaterial. What surprises me is that such an officer should be here at all, bothering about this stone. It only shows what excitement has been caused in Shensi by our bringing the tablet away."

"You will remember, doctor," Dave could not help saying, "that I strongly advised against borrowing it."

"I know all about that," growled the doctor. "We've thrashed it all out, haven't we? What's the use of bringing it up

again? By the way, I owe you six months' salary. I'll give you a check before you go."

"Now, doctor—" began Dave in an expository tone.

"I had four other messages," interrupted Dr. Goughlin, going on with his narration. "Two were red balls which got into my study mysteriously, and the other two came in a businesslike way through the mail. The balls ordered me to return the Nestorian Tablet to Hsian Fu, and the letters threatened me with death if I did. Now somebody has stolen the tablet. Nice mess, isn't it?"

"May I see the notes?" asked Dave. "I suppose you've saved them."

"Yes, here they are," returned the doctor carelessly as he opened the drawer of his table. "Just crank messages. They are always pretty much the same, whether written in Chinese, English, Sanscrit, or Choctaw. Their only importance in this case lies in the possibility of their leading to the miscreants who drugged me and stole that tablet."

David Carter, as a lifelong student of China and her people, was familiar with most of the Chinese dialects, particularly those of Shensi, Shantung, Anhui and other provinces of the northwest, and it was easy for him to read the messages into his native language. In all the red paper balls so dramatically conveyed to the doctor the wording was the same:

DR. GOUGHLIN:

You have four eyes in your house. But only for a little while. Their light will go out if the Stone of Ta t'sin is not at Pei Lin in the Middle Kingdom before the moon dies twice.

Neither Dave nor the doctor commented on the term "Ta t'sin." Both knew it was one of the many names by which the Chinese call the Nestorian Tablet.

"Now read the other—the one coming by mail," directed the doctor.

"It is practically the same as the red ball," said Dave after a look at the paper. "And yet it exactly contradicts the others, by leaving out the word 'not.' Every one of them has the death sign at the bottom—a rough drawing of a face without eyes.

Ghastly ideas of a joke these fellows have! These messages are all the clew you have, eh, doctor?"

"They are enough, Carter," replied the doctor, gritting his teeth. "The barbarous wretches! Trying to scare me by threatening Laura! What more proof do you need that it is the work of the Ko Lao Hui?"

"Looks like it," assented Dave tensely. "But they've given us another lead, so that there shall be no mistake. Look!"

He took the doctor by the elbow and drew him over to the rifled packing case which had contained the Nestorian Tablet. On the case was a little heap of fine sandy loam, which, with its indescribable but unmistakable suggestion of death and decay, resembled, and yet was unlike, the sand of America's own great desert in the Southwest.

"It is loess," whispered the doctor, slowly. "The first I ever saw in America."

"And it is the last word in Ko Lao Hui menace," added Dave, with involuntary solemnity.

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS.

THE two men stood alternately looking at the little heap of sand and at each other in silence as if both were mutely asking: "What next?" when the whirring jingle of an electric bell came to them sharply from the hall through the open door.

"The telephone!" exclaimed Dr. Amos. "It's ten o'clock. Who wants me at this hour, I wonder? Go and see, Dave."

There could be no question that Dave Carter had been thoroughly reinstated as the doctor's secretary. The order was quite in Dr. Goughlin's usual manner. Like most deep students, he was absent-minded, and threw his commands around in his own household without any thought of what he was doing. He would have talked just the same to Laura.

Dave knew this, and obeyed as a matter of course. There was only one telephone in the house—for the doctor would not be

bothered with one in his study—and the instrument stood on a table in the hall. As Dave came out of the study he saw Laura with the receiver in her hand and heard her say over the wire:

"This is Miss Goughlin. Do you want to speak to the doctor? No? You want to speak to *me*? Oh, yes. This is Ching Wah? What is it, Ching? To-morrow evening, at seven?"

There was a pause, during which Dave stared at Laura impatiently. Evidently it was one of her Chinese pupils on the wire. But what did he mean by calling her up at this hour of night—or even calling her on the telephone at all? Dave was not enthusiastic over Chinese missions, with his fiancée as one of the teachers.

"Good gracious!" burst from Laura, still over the phone. "You have heard about the Nest—about the robbery? Why, this is extraordinary. That's what you mean by to-morrow evening at seven. I couldn't understand. Oh, you mean for my father to come, but that I ought to come with him? Wait, please. Hold the wire."

She turned to Dave, and saw that her father had also come from the study and was listening.

"This is Ching Wah, a new member of my Bible class. He is a doctor, and has come to this country to study American methods in his profession, he says. He has traveled a great deal and speaks English and other European tongues. You'll like him, dad. He doesn't live in Chinatown, but practices there as a physician, and knows everybody in that locality."

"Well, well, what is all this leading up to?" broke in the doctor irritably. "What's it all about, Laura?"

"He knows something about the people who stole the Nestorian Tablet from your study to-night. He wants you to come to the corner of Doyers Street at seven to-morrow evening—it will still be light then—and he will have valuable information for you. He wants me to come with you. You would not know him otherwise, and he does not know you."

"All right," interrupted the doctor. "Tell him I will be there, with you and my secretary. Then ring off. I don't want to

discuss this matter by telephone. Meeting on a street corner! That's a dignified thing to do."

"Very well, Ching Wah," said Laura over the wire. "We will be at the corner of Doyers Street at seven to-morrow." Then, like an obedient daughter, she rang off.

"Who is this fellow Ching Wah?" demanded Dr. Amos. "Doubt if he is a doctor—with his street corner tricks. What's he doing in your Bible class?"

"He's a convert, dad. I believe he knows more about the Bible than I do," rejoined Laura reproachfully. She was very earnest in her mission work.

Dr. Goughlin snorted. "Well, it's time you went to bed. Dave, get around about ten in the morning. Good night! I have some work to do."

He marched off to his study and closed the door with a bang. Dave knew, as well as if he had followed him in, that his work consisted in examining the bamboo "blinder," with its India-ink warning and in carefully gathering up the little heap of loess for future reference. The doctor had quite recovered from the effects of the drug that had temporarily taken away his senses, but the loss of the Nestorian Tablet was like a stunning blow from a blackjack or sandbag, and his head swam as he tried to comprehend in what way this Ching Wah could help in its recovery.

Dave said good-night to Laura as soon as her father had closed his door. But a lovers' farewell is notoriously a protracted proceeding, and it was nearly half an hour later when he actually got away and looked for a Fifth Avenue bus to take him uptown.

He lived in one of the numerous hotels off Times Square in the "roaring Forties," and it was a walk of two blocks from the bus to his residence.

Was it only imagination, or was there a shadowy figure dodging along behind him, slipping into doorways when he turned around, and once effacing itself in the blackness of a wooden tunnel in front of a building in course of construction as he stopped suddenly to decide whether or not he was followed? Footpads are common enough in New York, and Dave had no

mind to be knocked on the head and robbed if vigilance would prevent it.

He reached his hotel in safety, however, and, after one look up and down the street from the doorway without seeing anything suspicious, went to the desk for his key.

"A package for you, Mr. Carter," said the clerk. "Came about half an hour ago, by A. D. T." He handed Dave a small oblong parcel, wrapped in brown paper and obviously a cardboard box, for it was very light.

"Hope it isn't an infernal machine or a bomb," laughed Dave, as he took it and made for the elevator.

He was not much afraid of anything of the kind, but there could be no harm in exercising ordinary caution. So it was very gingerly that he untied the string and removed the wrapper. As he had surmised, it was a box of cardboard, and he saw the name of a well-known candy firm on the lid.

"Now," he muttered, "it is when you take off the lid that these infernal things usually let go. Wonder if it wouldn't be well to douse it in water before I open it."

He said this to himself with a smile of scorn at his own suggestion. Taking out his penknife, he cautiously cut a small hole in one end. Nothing happened, so he cut another hole in the top, larger than the other, and soon satisfied himself that there were no wires or strings connecting with the lid. Then he pulled it off.

The box was full of red paper, squeezed into a ball. He recognized it as similar to the red balls Dr. Amos had taken from his table drawer, and he knew what it was before he spread the paper open.

Just a few Chinese characters, which he deciphered without difficulty.

Don't go to Doyers Street to-morrow!

That was all.

David Carter read and reread the message. Next he examined the paper closely for anything that might help him to guess at the author.

He knew that there were two opposing forces interested in the Nestorian Tablet. But whether this warning came from the persons who wanted it sent back, or from the others who had told Dr. Goughlin not

to send it, till he had personal permission from a Ta Ko, he could not tell.

There was a third possibility—that it came from the rascals who had stolen the tablet. And the thieves might be either one or the other parties who had sent the doctor the conflicting messages.

Dave knew the subtle ways of the Ko Lao Hui, and he realized that he was up against a particularly complicated Chinese puzzle.

He had just made up his mind to go to bed and forget it—smiling as he thought of his retrieved secretaryship and of Laura's willingness to take him even if he had been "broke"—when his telephone rang. It was Laura's agitated voice that came over the wire in response to his brisk "David Carter speaking."

"Oh, Dave, somebody has just telephoned me not to go to that place at seven to-morrow—you know. What shall I do?"

"You don't know who it was phoned? Not Ching Wah, was it?" he asked.

"I don't think so. I don't believe it was a Chinese speaking, although he mumbled as if trying to disguise his voice. There was no singsong, you know."

Dave hesitated a moment. Then: "Well, you go to bed and we'll talk it over in the morning. Don't say a word about it to any one. Good night! I'll be with you about nine."

"Very well!" was her answer. "But I just *had* to tell you."

"Poor girl!" said Dave to himself, as he switched off his light half an hour later. "Damn the Nestorian Tablet!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRYST.

"**W**HAT do you think we'd better do, Dave?" was Laura's eager greeting, as he swung up the steps and into the hall of the Goughlin home shortly after nine the next morning.

There were two maids in the house to answer the door as part of their duties, but Laura had been looking for Dave herself.

"Have you Ching Wah's address?" he asked, after a moment's consideration.

"No. I only know he says it is not in Chinatown."

"Then we can't get at him—by telephone or otherwise. Rather a pity. He might know who is interested in keeping us away from Doyers Street to-night. Of course I have a strong suspicion. But I should like to be sure. By the way, I had a similar warning to yours last night, only mine came in writing."

"In writing?"

"Yes, in Chinese, and on the same kind of red paper as some messages sent to Dr. Amos. It is all pretty obvious, it seems to me."

"Then we shall go to-night?" she said, quickly.

"Of course. That is, *I* will, and I'm afraid I couldn't stop your father. But I don't like all this mystery, and you will stay away if I can persuade you."

"You can't," she declared, with flashing eyes. "I don't know what these warnings mean, but I'm going to do anything I can to get back the Nestorian Tablet. Besides, I trust Ching Wah."

"I see," was Dave's dry response.

"Don't *you* trust him? He is a gentleman, a fervent Christian and speaks as fluent English as you and I, with hardly a trace of accent."

"Sounds all right," returned Dave. "I shall be interested in meeting him. Is the doctor in his study yet?"

"Yes, he finished breakfast half an hour ago, and went right away from the table."

"Have you talked to him about the tablet, the robbery, and the business to-night?"

"Not in particular," she answered. "I was anxious to know whether he felt any effects from that drug. When he said he was quite well, I saw he didn't want to discuss it, and I said no more. You know dad's rather peculiar ways."

"No one better, I guess," smiled Dave, as he turned away to go to the study. "Go to the piano for a while, Laura," he paused to say. "Nothing like music to compose your nerves."

Dr. Goughlin looked up from his table, on which were the red balls of paper, the

sinister bamboo sticks tied together, and a paper on which lay the little heap of loess. He had been inspecting the sand through a magnifying-glass.

"This is loess beyond a doubt," he said. "Look at it through the glass, Dave."

"Not necessary," was the young man's reply, "if you have done so. We knew yesterday it was loess. The only question was why it was here, and that could be answered, I think, in view of what has happened, by the three short words: Ko Lao Hui."

"Well, we shall find out to-night, perhaps. Of course the Ko Lao Hui means to blackmail me, but I'll pay a reasonable sum to get that stone back. It's the easiest way, even though it is uncomfortably like compounding a felony. What I can't understand is the position of this Ching Wah in the affair. If he can lead us to the stone, as he intimated in his telephone to Laura last night, it looks as if he is one of the thieves."

"It may be," assented Dave, slowly. "Still, if he is a doctor with a more or less large practice in Chinatown, he would have an opportunity of learning a great deal which would not come to him otherwise. One thing is sure, in view of his religious professions, which have led him into a Bible class, he is either perfectly straight or a dangerous hypocrite."

"Well, we'll be on our guard," returned the doctor, as he put the bamboo sticks and other exhibits in his desk. "But keep in mind the important fact that we *must* get back the Nestorian Tablet, if we have to fight, as well as pay, for it."

Tacitly they agreed to drop the subject for the present. The doctor had missed Dave during his six months' absence more than he would confess, and there were appalling arrears of research work that the doctor had found very difficult and fatiguing without the aid of his efficient and always enthusiastic secretary.

Dinner was usually at half-past six in Dr. Goughlin's home, but Laura had advanced it to five o'clock, so that the three were in a taxi on their way to keep their strange tryst with Ching Wah by six thirty.

At Laura's request, Dave, who had dined

with her and the doctor, had engaged a taxi to take them as far as Canal Street and the Bowery, from which point they walked to Chinatown. Obviously it would have been unwise to use their own car. The chauffeur was an old employee, but Dr. Goughlin was not the man to make a confidant of one of his servants, especially in such a case as this.

"Stay here with Laura," directed Dave, who had taken charge of the expedition and made no bones of giving orders to the doctor. "Doyers Street is only two blocks away. I'll go and see whether Ching Wah is there."

They were in that part of the Bowery known as Chatham Square. The doctor, taking his daughter's arm, nodded acquiescence and walked slowly toward the corner of Mott Street, around which Dave quickly disappeared.

He was back in less than three minutes, with the information that Ching Wah was not in sight.

"But we are ten minutes ahead of time," he added. "Let's go around there. Even if we do have to wait a few moments, Chinatown is always interesting."

"I wish the Mission were open. We could go in and wait," suggested Laura. "But, of course, if it had been open, Ching Wah would have told me to go there, where he would know I would be perfectly safe."

"You are safe now, I should think, with your father," rumbled the doctor. "You are right, Dave. This locality is interesting. But, after all, it is only a distorted copy of the cities we have seen in China. And a copy is always a copy."

"Hope the replica of the Nestorian Tablet is not in that class," observed Dave mischievously.

The doctor had opened his mouth to storm that his copy of the tablet was perfect, just as Dave knew he would, when a smiling, pale-faced young man in a neat chauffeur's uniform, with large goggles on the cap, stepped up to him, and touching his cap with a forefinger, said:

"I beg your pardon, sir. Are you expecting to see Dr. Ching Wah?"

"Yes. Where is he?" was Dr. Goughlin's gruff response.

"Dr. Ching Wah is very sorry, sir. But he has been suddenly called to a case—man hurt, needing immediate attention—and Dr. Ching Wah, as a very humane—"

"How long will he be?" cut in Dave. "How is it *you* are here?"

"I had driven him from home to the corner, and was just going away with the car for an hour, according to his instructions, when some persons who knew him rushed up and begged him to go with them to see a man who would die if he didn't have a doctor at once."

"Were these persons Chinese?" asked Dave.

"All three of them, sir," was the reply. "So is the man who is hurt. The doctor told me to take you into the house where he intended to direct you to the valuable article you have lost, and to assure you that he would be with you at the earliest possible moment. It is a tea house, and there is a private room in which you and the lady will be comfortable in the meantime. May I show you, sir?"

Dr. Goughlin and Dave exchanged suspicious glances. But Laura interrupted to say that she knew the tea house was respectable, and that teachers at the Mission often visited it for a cup of tea.

"All right, Laura," growled her father. "If you know the place—"

"This way, sir," said the chauffeur softly, as he pushed open a door and led them in.

It was a medium-sized room, furnished with the inlaid ebony tables and light bamboo chairs common in Chinese restaurants, and with many pictures and open fans of unmistakably Chinese manufacture on the walls. There was one man in the place, in a short quilted satin robe and felt slippers, whose braided queue was coiled around his head. His yellow, flat face was expressionless as the chauffeur walked through and opened a door at the back.

"That's the waiter. He'll bring you some tea if you desire it," explained the chauffeur, stepping back for them to pass him. "Through this hall and down the few stairs. The room door is open."

There were kerosene lamps on brackets in the hall and on the stairs, but the rather

floridly furnished room beyond was brilliantly lighted by electricity.

"What do you think?" the doctor asked Dave. "Looks all right, eh?"

"You have your gun with you?" was all Dave replied, in so low a tone that neither Laura nor the chauffeur could hear.

"Of course," was the guarded reply. "I am not quite a fool. Sit down on that sofa, Laura," he directed aloud. "What's beyond this room?" he asked of the chauffeur.

"The yard, sir. See!"

He opened a door and showed that at the end of another hall was an open door giving upon a paved yard from which the daylight had not yet quite departed.

"You will be comfortable here, sir—and the lady, too. I can promise that Dr. Ching Wah will not be long." He closed the door to the yard and walked to that by which they had entered. "Ten minutes, at the outside, I should say, before Dr. Ching Wah comes."

He touched his cap with his forefinger again and went out, closing the door behind him.

At that instant out went all the electric bulbs, and the room was in pitch-darkness.

CHAPTER V.

DAVE GETS ACTION.

TWO men who had more than once penetrated the fastnesses* of a lawless desert region like the loess country of Northwest China, where the notorious "White Wolf" brigands and the deadly Ko Lao Hui between them held whole provinces in abject terror, and where a band of cutthroats might spring murderously out of any ravine along the way, were not likely to be nonplused by the sudden going out of the lights in a strange room, even though it were in the mysterious bowels of a furtive house in Chinatown.

"Don't worry, Laura!" admonished the firm voice of David Carter out of the oppressive blackness. "Sit tight for just a moment. It's probably a short circuit somewhere. They'll come on again directly."

But he was not waiting for the lights.

His accurate sense of direction, fostered by many a blind trail through valleys and over mountains where white men seldom trod, enabled him to move straight to the door leading to the yard.

It was locked—perhaps bolted and barred. Not in the slightest would it yield as he hurled all his weight against it.

At the same instant there came a growl of chagrin from Dr. Amos, who, without speaking, had found the door by which they had entered, but could not force it open.

The gentlemanly chauffeur, going out, had slipped a couple of heavy bolts into their sockets.

"He fooled us!" roared the doctor. "That chauffeur is as big a scoundrel as his employer—Ching Wall, or whatever his name is. Look out, Laura! Stay where you are! And you, too, Dave! I'm going to shoot our way out. I'll get through this door somehow. Then that smirking chauffeur had better look out!"

Dave did not offer any protest. Evidently there was treachery working against them, and it was incumbent for them to get out of the trap even at the pistol's point. He felt for his own automatic in his hip-pocket.

There was a click in the darkness at the other side of the room, followed by a stifled "Damn!" in Dr. Amos's voice. His gun had missed fire.

Simultaneously two pairs of powerful hands seized David Carter's arms, a cloth was stuffed into his mouth, and he felt himself pushed through a doorway into what he judged, by the smell, was an earth-floored passage or a series of cellars—he could not tell which. What he did realize was that the apartment he had just been forced to leave had more doors than the two he had noticed.

For about thirty or forty feet he was hurried along in darkness, going down a few steps twice, until he and his captors were stopped by a door.

It was too dark to see the door, but a loud banging by one of the men with him, followed by a sudden flood of light as the door was flung open, revealed it to him.

He was shoved forward into a large, low

room in which was a stifling odor of burned-out opium, easily explained by half a dozen bunks, half hidden by curtains of dirty chintz, along two of the walls, while on several little tables were the small lamps and pipes used by smokers.

Among the few men in the room the first one Dave recognized through the poisonous murk was the pale-faced chauffeur. The next was the raging Dr. Amos Goughlin, tearing a gag from his mouth and glaring around him like a trapped grizzly.

He did not see Laura.

"Here, you yellow scalawags!" bellowed Dr. Goughlin. "What does all this mean? Do you know this is New York City, and that Police Headquarters is only a few blocks away? And you, you grinning ape!"

He made a rush at the chauffeur. But that watchful young man caught his arms and twisted them till he sank back on one of the bunks, overcome by sheer physical anguish. It should be remembered that Dr. Amos was not far from sixty, and no longer retained the resilience and ability to bear pain that he may have enjoyed thirty years before.

"Keep quiet, doctor," said Dave, in French—as the language the enemy would be least likely to know. "Our chance will come."

"That's a cinch," whispered the chauffeur behind him.

As Dave's eyes became accustomed to the murky gloom, he recognized a big Chinaman in a chair by a table at the head of the room as the Ko Lao Hui man who, two years before, had sold the Nestorian Tablet to Dr. Goughlin in the bamboo shack just outside Hsian Fu, and he was not much surprised.

The other Chinese present, of the coolie class, he did not know.

"Door tight?" asked the big Chinaman in Shensi, which to Dave and the doctor was as clear as English.

"Not tight yet," replied one of the coolies. "You want the little missy?"

"Bring her in," was the order. "Then fasten the door."

But for the sinewy hand of the chauffeur on Dave's elbow, and a murmured warning: "Hold your horses!" he would

have throttled at least one of the greasy-looking coolies who held Laura's arms as they led her in. The bare thought of their clawlike fingers grasping her through her thin sleeves maddened him.

Fortunately for Dave's self-control, they released her as soon as the chauffeur had been at the door and held up the key to the big Chinaman to indicate that it was locked. One of the coolies pushed forward a rocking-chair, into which Laura sank gratefully.

At the same moment the chauffeur whispered in Dave's ear: "All set!"

"I get you," was Dave's guarded reply, without looking around.

"You know me?" was the first direct question of the big Chinaman to Dr. Goughlin, in Shensi.

"Of course I know you," snapped the doctor, in the same dialect. "You sold me the Nestorian Tablet. Now you have stolen it from me."

"That all?"—showing his yellow teeth in a sneering grin.

"You or some of your gang have tried to frighten me with messages, signs and symbols, all pointing one way—to get more money out of me."

The grin on the flat face of the big man widened.

"You are thinking the right way," he said. "Money is what I want. But you will get something for it—something you must have, to save you and your daughter from—*this*!" He pounced suddenly upon the table and took from it a pair of pointed bamboo sticks fastened together—the horrible instrument called "the blinder," which he held up before him.

David Carter strained to get away from the men holding him when he heard this. But he did not speak. It would be better to bide his time. He was thankful Laura did not understand Shensi.

"I don't quite see the drift of your words," said Dr. Amos. "What do you mean?"

"The Nestorian Tablet must be on its way to the Pei Lin in a few days. If not, the Ko Lao Hui will do the will of the High Power at Hsian Fu—will punish those who have violated the Sacred Temple by

taking away its most precious archives. I am the Ta Ko sent here for the tablet. I do my duty."

"Why, you damned yellow crook—" burst out Dr. Goughlin in English. Then, in Shensi: "You have the tablet! Why don't you send it back? What is your game, anyhow?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars—to be taken back by me to the Ko Lao Hui, is what you must pay," returned the other coolly. "I will take the money—and the Nestorian Tablet—back to Hsian Fu, and you will hear nothing more about it till you get an official paper from the guardians of the Pei Lin telling you it is there."

"He's lying," remarked Dave quietly in French.

"I know that," returned the doctor in the same tongue.

"What do you say?" demanded the Chinaman sharply. "Speak Shensi."

"If I am to pay you all that money," said Dr. Goughlin, in Shensi, "I must be sure you have the Nestorian Tablet. Show it to me."

"That is easily done," replied the Chinaman, throwing the bamboo sticks on the table.

He made a peremptory sign. Instantly an obsequious coolie dived into one of the empty bunks, and from behind the chintz curtains brought forth a large flat stone, gray with age, but with its scholarly records made by Nestorian missionaries many centuries ago showing plainly in the light of the kerosene wall lamps.

"That's the Nestorian, Dave, beyond question," said Dr. Goughlin in French. "But it's all humbug about their intention to take it back to China. It's just a plain hold-up. They think they can bleed me for twenty-five to begin with, and the Lord knows how much more after that."

"Speak Shensi, I told you," thundered the Chinaman, banging his fist on the table.

Dave had picked up the tablet and was holding it as close to the nearest lamp as he could, gradually backing away from the table. The Chinaman, in hammering on the table, accidentally swept off the bamboo sticks.

He stooped to pick them up.

It was then that Dave, after a swift glance at the chauffeur, who was watching him, brought the heavy stone down on the Chinaman's head with a crash.

"Now, doctor!" shouted Dave in English. "Bring Laura!"

The chauffeur had flung the door wide open, and Dave rushed through, hugging the precious tablet, with Dr. Amos and Laura close on his heels.

Then the door banged shut, and they were racing headlong through the hall in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

BREAKING THROUGH.

"THIS way, sir!" It was the chauffeur's voice, and he had taken Dave's elbow. "Straight ahead! I know this house from cellar to roof. Here we are in the room where I locked you in."

"What did you do it for?" It was no time to ask questions, as Dave realized, but he was curious.

"I'll tell you later," replied the chauffeur. "But I wasn't so bad as I seemed. Hold on! We've got to force this door. Better put the stone down."

"No, sir," returned Dave firmly. "It'll never get out of my arms till I put it in Dr. Goughlin's study."

"What's the trouble?" asked the doctor's voice close behind. "Door locked?"

"Yes, but if we shove, all three of us, together, she'll give," said the chauffeur.

"Let her go, then!" grunted Dave, as holding the stone in one arm, he put his other hand against the door. "I can help!"

It took nearly a minute to burst the door open, but with three men putting all their weight against it, something had to give.

There was a splintering and cracking, and Dave fell flat, but with the tablet still clasped tightly to him.

They had broken through, and Dave caught the fresh coolness of the outside air on his face. The next minute the whole four were in the yard they had seen from the room half an hour or so before.

"This way!" said the chauffeur. "The lady all right?"

"Quite," answered Laura for herself. "Come on, dad!"

"Oh, I'm coming," replied her father gruffly. "Don't worry about me. So long as we have that confounded tablet, I don't care what happens. How do we get out of this yard?"

"Through here!" was the chauffeur's reply. "This dark hall takes us to the foot of a staircase. Then up about fifteen steps, and the front door is only a few yards ahead. But tread quietly. We don't know who might be lurking around. Some of these Chinks never go to bed. You go ahead with the stone," he advised Dave. "I'll come after you with the doctor and lady. But watch your step."

"All right," replied Dave. "Fifteen steps, you say. I'll go to the corner of the Bowery and look for a taxi. And yet, Laura, I don't like—"

"You conceited pup!" suddenly stormed the doctor. "Don't you think anybody can look after my daughter but yourself? You go ahead! And, mind you, don't lose that tablet or I'll break your neck! We'll follow in another taxi."

"Hush!" whispered the chauffeur angrily. "Don't you know there are more than a hundred men and women within earshot? That back tenement has a family in every room. Keep quiet, will you?"

The doctor subsided, and Dave, tiptoeing through the hall, found himself at the foot of the fifteen steps, alone.

"I'd rather have had Laura with me, all the same," he said mentally. "Then I'd know she's safe. The doctor's like a big kid! I don't believe he will ever grow up."

It is not difficult to pick up a taxi in the Bowery at night, and Dave secured one before he had walked two blocks on that busy thoroughfare.

He looked around him as he got in with his precious tablet and gave Dr. Goughlin's address to the driver. He did not see anything of the doctor and Laura, but in the hubbub of traffic that was not remarkable.

His cab glided away and turned a corner, headed west. He did not notice, as they crossed Broadway, a few minutes afterward, that another taxi was coming along about a dozen yards behind, and might not

have thought anything about it even if he had. Thousands of taxis are navigating in all directions in New York night and day.

A maid let him in when he reached his destination, and after paying the driver, with a satisfactory *douceur* in addition, he went straight to the doctor's study with the tablet. All the members of Dr. Goughlin's household were accustomed to his going where he pleased, as one of the family.

Placing the tablet in the packing case from which it had been rifled by the Ko Lao Hui, and which still lay, broken open, in a corner, Dave assured himself that the outer door and all the windows were securely fastened. Then he sat down in the doctor's chair at the table to wait.

CHAPTER VII.

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS.

DAVE had hardly settled himself when he heard the front door electric bell, and a minute later the maid came in to say that a man who looked like a chauffeur wanted to see him.

"I'll go to him," was Dave's quick response. Then, as his eye wandered to the tablet, and he thought of the possibility of this being a ruse of the enemy, he added: "No, bring him in."

As he had expected, it was the pale-faced man who had figured so actively in the adventures in Chinatown that night, but his visitor had lost his usual aspect of calm assurance and evidently was worried. He shut the door carefully. Then, in a low voice: "You'll have to go back to Mott Street as quickly as you can."

"Where are Dr. Goughlin and the young lady?" asked Dave hurriedly.

"That's the trouble," replied the other. "They are in that house, and they can't get out till you go."

"For the love of Mike!" broke in Dave in an exasperated tone. "Speak plainly, will you? What's your name?"

"Pierce, sir. Will you let me make a little explanation? My taxi is at the door. I told the man to wait."

"Go ahead, but be brief," was Dave's impatient rejoinder.

"I am not a chauffeur," began Pierce.

"I didn't suppose you were," interjected Dave.

"But it's a convenient character for what I have to do. I represent the Chinese government in New York, and am accredited to the Chinese Consulate here. My mission is to get possession of the Nestorian Tablet and see that it is properly shipped to Peking, whence it will be transferred to Hsian Fu and replaced in the Pei Lin. I intended to come to Dr. Goughlin, to make arrangements with him, when I heard that the tablet had been stolen."

"But where are Dr. and Miss Goughlin?" broke in Dave. "That's what I want to know."

"They are quite safe, but are detained until you go there," replied Pierce. "They are with Ching Wah."

"Who is this Ching Wah?" demanded Dave hotly. "Is he a doctor?"

"Yes, and he practices in Chinatown. But that is because he has been seeking the Nestorian Tablet. About the time he discovered that it had been sold to Dr. Goughlin, he learned in Chinatown that it had been stolen."

"Is he also a representative of the Chinese government? Are you and he working together?"

"No. Ching Wah knows that a large reward will be paid by the authorities of Peking, and also of Hsian Fu, for the return of the tablet, and he is trying to beat me to it. Moreover, he is a descendant of an ancient Manchu family that embraced Christianity many years ago—there are several like him in Shensi and other provinces in northwest China—and thinks it a sacred duty to take the tablet back. He is something of what may be called a zealot."

"I know," nodded Dave. "I've met one or two of them. But this fellow who says he is a Ta Ko of the Ko Lao Hui, and who got us into that foul-smelling opium joint—with your help—who is he?"

Pierce smiled a little sadly. "I had to *seem* to help, Mr. Carter, if we were to get possession of the Nestorian Tablet. I knew I could not get it from him by myself, but I figured that if you and Dr. Goughlin once know where it was the three of us could

make a successful fight and bring it away. As for that big Chinaman, he is a member of the Ko Lao Hui, but he's not a Ta Ko. He's one of the lowest riffraff in Hsian Fu. What in America we should call a 'cheap crook.' He heard of the big reward from the government for the return of the tablet, and he had the advantage of knowing that you had it, because he sold it to you. So he smuggled himself into this country, and tried to play both ends against the middle by holding you up for twenty-five thousand dollars, in addition to the reward he expected to get in China."

"Well, I gave him a good crack with that stone," remarked Dave with a grim smile. "I hope his head aches. You say that Dr. Goughlin and Miss Goughlin will be released when I go to Ching Wah? What does he want with me?"

"You are to take the Nestorian Tablet with you."

Dave stared angrily.

"What—give it up to him after all this trouble to get it?"

"Miss Goughlin would be in danger if you refused?" said Pierce quietly. "And the doctor, too."

Dave strode up and down the room, frowning. What should he do? On the one hand, how could he lose the Nestorian Tablet now that he had fought for and got it? On the other, there was Laura! As for the doctor, would he not say that he would take any risk rather than let the tablet go out of his hands except to the government authorities in China who were entitled to it?

"Guess we won't take the tablet," he said at last, swinging around to face Pierce. "I'll go and see this fellow Ching Wah. At the worst, there are the police."

Pierce shook his head. "Wouldn't do! Ching Wah has spies, and the police would never find him—or Miss Goughlin, either," he added ominously.

"That's true, too."

Dave knew the secret ways of Chinatown, and how difficult it was for the police to get hold of any one who had once taken refuge in the network of connecting rooms and queer burrows of that strange district. He made a sudden resolution.

"Go down to the taxi," he said, "and I'll be with you in a few minutes."

"With the tablet?" asked Pierce.

"With the tablet," was Dave's deliberate reply.

Pierce turned away without another word and went down to where the taxi driver was dozing in his seat in the cab.

By the time Pierce had made the sleepy driver understand he was to go right back to the corner on the Bowery where he had been engaged, David Carter came down the steps from the house, hugging a big flat parcel, wrapped in paper, in his arms.

"Here it is," he said quietly as he stepped into the cab, followed by Pierce. "But I won't give it up if it can be possibly avoided."

"Of course not," returned Pierce as the taxi started.

CHAPTER VIII.

PUNISHMENT.

THEY got out of the taxi some three blocks from the corner of Mott Street, and went straight to a gloomy store in which all kinds of Chinese foods, sweetmeats and perfumes were sold. There are many such stores in Chinatown, always well stocked with wares that only a Chinaman could name, and which exude a spicy odor one never meets anywhere else.

An elderly Cantonese, calmly smoking behind the counter, apathetic as most of the Chinese denizens of New York appear to be, but seeing everything with his sleepy black eyes, regarded them without interest as they went in. If he wondered what David Carter was carrying it did not show in his flat, yellow face.

Pierce stepped up to the counter and made a peculiar motion with his fingers. The Chinaman lazily imitated him. Then Pierce said, "Ko," the Chinaman, "Lao," and Pierce "Hui." As Pierce uttered this last word a paneled door opened without being touched at the rear of the store, and the two visitors went through. Five minutes later, after traversing tortuous passages that Pierce seemed to know, and giving certain raps on a door in a dark corner, they

were in the lodge room of the Ko Lao Hui—the only one in New York.

David Carter knew there was such a lodge room somewhere, but he was not prepared for the brilliancy which dazzled him as the door was opened by some unseen agency and quickly closed behind them.

It was long and rather narrow, like most lodge rooms, but not so large as most of those familiar to Americans who are members of secret societies. What it lacked in size it made up in gorgeousness, however, for the walls were entirely hidden in silken draperies embroidered in gold and silver and colorful threads of silk, giving the whole interior an air of Oriental luxuriousness.

Dragons, mermaids, strange animals known only to mythology or demonology, flamingoes, birds of paradise, scarlet poppies, yellow lilies, sunflowers—all these and many more were presented strikingly in their natural hues.

Chairs of ebony, ivory and gold stood at measured intervals, as in any other lodge room, and on a dais at the upper end was a table of ebony and ivory, wonderfully carved and glittering with what looked like real jewels. A brazier was on the table.

It was on this handsome table and the canopied throne chair behind it that Dave's attention was at once fixed, for in the chair, wearing a rich robe of gold-embroidered satin, sat a dignified man who, Pierce whispered, was none other than Ching Wah, the real Ta Ko of the Ko Lao Hui in New York.

Dave had never seen him before. One look now was enough to assure him that this Ta Ko was indeed the fierce zealot Pierce had pronounced him. The wildness in his glittering, restless eyes, the high forehead bulging above them, and the perpetual aimless clutching of the long fingers, made it easy to believe Ching Wah was one who held his religious faith so precious that he might even commit murder for its sake.

"Who are these?" he demanded in a hollow voice as two gigantic Chinamen, facing each other across the room halfway down, motioned Dave to advance. Then, without waiting for or seemingly expecting an answer, he went on: "Have you brought the Nestorian Tablet?"

"Where is Dr. Goughlin and his daughter?" countered Dave, who found Ching Wah's pompous manner rather irritating.

"His daughter?" repeated Ching Wah coldly.

"Yes, you know whom I mean," Dave flung back at him heatedly. "You are a member of her Bible class."

"I am Ta Ko, of the Ko Lao Hui, and I am presiding over this lodge room," was Ching Wah's stern reply. "I do not talk of Bible classes here. Have you brought the tablet?"

"You see it," answered Dave, suddenly tearing off the paper and revealing the gray stone with the ancient inscriptions that had been inspired by the long dead-and-gone Nestorian missionaries clearly showing.

The dialogue had been carried on entirely in English, which Ching Wah spoke fluently. He nodded in recognition of the stone, and in Shensi addressed the two Chinese attendants. They were the only persons in the room besides himself and his two visitors. He told them to bring in the two persons in the anteroom.

The next moment Dr. Goughlin, with Laura hanging to his arm, marched in between the two Chinese guards.

Ching Wah motioned to a divan, and the doctor, after one quick glance at Dave and his companion, sat down without speaking, Laura seemed about to run to Dave, but a whispered word from her father brought her to a seat by his side.

"Dr. Goughlin, and you, the daughter," said Ching Wah, in his monotonously solemn tones, as the two big guards resumed their old stations, "the Nestorian Tablet has been restored to me, to be taken back to its home in the Pei Lin. When I have examined the stone, you will be free to go. I hope this will be a lesson to Dr. Goughlin, and to all other profane Americans, not to lay desecrating hands on the holy archives that have come down to the Manchu men who believe in the Nazarene, and that are a sacred trust to every man in Shensi."

A quick look from Dave and a warning shake of the head from Pierce behind him stifled in his throat an indignant assertion from Dr. Goughlin that the Nestorian Tablet would never be given up, and Ching

Wah continued with unabated pompousness:

"As Ta Ko of this lodge, as well as a representative of the government of the Middle Temple of Hsian Fu, I have to pass sentence on a miscreant who has been false to his vows as a Ko Lao Hui, and also is guilty of an unpardonable sin in seeking to steal, for his own base advantage, the veritable Rock of Ages of the only true faith man ever has known. It is well that you should see what might have been your punishment if the tablet had not been brought here to me to-night." He paused. Then, in Shensi, to the two guards: "Bring him in!"

Much of the pompousness of Ching Wah might be traced to his rather overwhelming estimation of his dignity as the only Ko Lao Hui lodge master in New York, giving him extraordinary powers. But Dave, always a close observer of man everywhere, and, in addition, a deep student of mentality in its many abnormal manifestations, was satisfied that also a religious frenzy had distorted his brain and was answerable for the conviction that any extreme act was justified for the sake of the Nestorian Tablet. In other words, Ching Wah might at any moment develop into a dangerous fanatic.

The two guards went through a doorway on the opposite side from which they had led in Dr. Goughlin and Laura, and a few seconds later came back dragging in the Ko Lao Hui rascal who had tried to get twenty-five thousand dollars as the price of the stolen Nestorian Tablet, and whom Dave had so neatly smashed on the head as he and the others made their escape.

That Dave's blow had been a severe one was evidenced by the white cloth tied over the Chinaman's head. He started when he saw Dave, and favored the young man with a venomous glare from his black eyes. Then he looked at Ching Wah, in his great chair of office and shivered. No doubt he had a premonition of what was to come. His arms were tightly bound to his sides.

Ching Wah was brief in what he had to say. In stern, merciless accents, in the Shensi tongue, he addressed the trembling prisoner:

"Fong Wo, you have falsely pretended to be the Ta Ko of the Ko Lao Hui, and you have brought disgrace on our great order by the theft of the sacred Nestorian Tablet. There is but one penalty for your crimes."

He bent forward and took from the other side of the brazier on the table, where it had been invisible to Dave, the pair of tied bamboo sticks whose grisly purpose he and Dr. Goughlin well knew.

As Ching Wah held up the sticks it could be seen that their points were faintly smoking. They had been lying near the fire, but not in it, so that they would become hot without actually burning.

At a sign from Ching Wah one of the guards came forward, made a deep obeisance and took the bamboo sticks. Then the two dragged the miserable Fong Wo back to the place he had come from.

They closed the door.

There was silence for a few moments. Then an awful shriek, muffled by the intervening door. Ching Wah, raising his hand solemnly, said in English:

"It is done! He will never see again! Thus it would have been with you—father, daughter, and son that is to be—had the Nestorian Tablet not been restored. Bring the tablet to me."

CHAPTER IX.

DAVE TOOK NO CHANCES.

DAVE had held the stone in his arms through it all. At the command of Ching Wah to take it to him, Pierce suddenly shouted, "Now!" and darted for the door behind him. With one tug it was open, and he pulled Dave to it.

"Come, doctor! Bring the lady!" roared Pierce. "Don't look back! Turn to the right in the hallway!"

Dave saw that Dr. Goughlin was running to the door with Laura and that Pierce was staying behind as a rear guard. Dave had rushed through the door into darkness, when a scream from Laura brought him back in a hurry.

Things moved swiftly.

Dave had a confused vision of Ching

Wah, who had swept down from his throne chair, seizing Laura by the arm. Then there was the crack of a pistol, and as Ching Wah fell forward on his face, Pierce took Laura by one wrist, while her father held the other, and came surging through the door, closing it after them with a bang.

"It's all right," said Pierce breathlessly. "Keep going till you come to the first corner on the right. We'll get out another way. I know this place!"

Through the labyrinth of passages and up and down steps went Pierce, showing an occasional light from a pocket flash, and before Dave expected it, they were on the quiet, deserted street. Another five minutes and all four were in a taxicab.

"Wasn't it awful, Dave?" she said. "And Ching Wah! I thought he was so good!"

"He's *good* now," put in Pierce grimly. "But I *had* to do it. It was his life or—" He paused. "If he had managed to keep Miss Goughlin there—"

"That will do, Pierce!" interrupted Dave sternly. "Talk about that another time."

After reaching the Goughlin home they went direct to the doctor's study.

"I'll bring my credentials later, doctor," said Pierce in his businesslike way. "And you can make inquiries at the Chinese Consulate, where they will give you an official receipt for the stone. If there is nothing else now, I'll say good night."

He had not sat down, and was already at the door to go, when Dr. Goughlin, who had taken the stone from Dave, uttered a surprised exclamation:

"Why, what's this? This isn't the Nestorian Tablet!"

"I know that," returned Dave coolly. "This is the replica you have had made. And a mighty good one it is."

Pierce looked startled.

"But—" stammered the doctor.

"All right!" interrupted Dave. "If Mr. Pierce will step out of the room a moment I'll show you something. He can come back in two or three minutes."

After Pierce went out, Dave pushed the table aside, lifted a rug and revealed a trap door, with a secret spring lock.

The edges of the trap were so neatly worked into the pattern of the polished mosaic floor that they were not easily traced. But Dave knew the trick of it and immediately swung open the trap without difficulty, showing a space five feet square.

Lying flat was the packing case which Dr. Goughlin recognized at once as that which had held the Nestorian Tablet, and from which Dave lifted the precious inscribed stone that had come from the far-away Pei Lin.

He closed the trap, adjusted the rug and pushed the table back into place. Then he stepped to the door and called in Pierce. He had been holding the stone all this time. Now, with Pierce, Dr. Goughlin, and Laura all watching him interestedly, he laid the stone on the table and said with a smile:

"There is the real Nestorian Tablet. I wasn't taking any chances. If I had been absolutely obliged to give up a tablet to that crazy Ching Wah he would have got only the replica. And I should have hated to give up even that. Remember, Pierce, when you went out to the cab without me? That was when I changed them."

Pierce looked at the tablet, grinned, seized Dave's hand, and saying: "You're all right!" vanished and went home.

"I shall have to agree with Pierce," grunted Dr. Goughlin as he smiled happily on his precious tablet. "You *are* all right."

"What do you think, Laura?" whispered Dave as the doctor returned to a close inspection of the Nestorian Tablet and took no further notice of them.

She whispered something with a mischievous dimpled smile, and Dave called out, "Oh, doctor, by the way, do I still hold my job as your secretary?"

"Don't bother me," replied the doctor, still absorbed in studying the precious tablet. "Ask another foolish question and I'm damned if I don't do to you what you did to that Chinaman—bang you over the head with the Nestorian Tablet."

"Very well! Good night, doctor! Laura, do you know how to open that front door? I don't believe I can do it."

"Well, it is rather awkward," she agreed shyly. "I'll go down there with you."

The Fear-Sway

Part II
by Kenneth Perkins

Author of "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.



WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A BAD horse named "Crater" is about to be killed publicly in a Western city when Tom Drury, a Texas cowboy, offers to tame it and save its life. He does this because Crater's owner, an attractive young woman, contemplates the horse's death with sadness. Drury succeeds. Because of his courage the girl gives him the horse, and her grandfather, Peter Gaunt, an old frontiersman, interests him in the search for an outlaw, the Gila Monster, who has terrorized the region beyond the desert and dispossessed Gaunt and his granddaughter of their ranch. Drury sets out for the unknown bandit's domain, accompanied by Henry Sugg, the only man who dared volunteer as guide. During the second day of their ride into the desert Drury suspects that his guide is no other than the bandit chief himself, and presently is sure of it when he suddenly finds himself covered with his own gun.

CHAPTER VI.

HENRY SUGG'S GOOD-BY.

A SUDDEN surge of anger came over Drury as he realized how absurdly he had been tricked. "Sugg, are you handing me that gun?" he cried out almost desperately.

"I reckon you know, Mr. Drury," Sugg rejoined calmly.

"What the hell do you reckon I know?"

Both men slowed their horses to a walk. Sugg's bay, feeling his master's knees, came to a stop.

"I reckon you know I won't give you this six-gun, so dismount and stand over there, Mr. Drury, and don't let your hands get too near your belt or your shirt."

Drury obeyed. His captor then dismounted in turn and went over to him,

searched him, and satisfying himself that he had Drury's only weapon, stepped back and with his disengaged hand lit a cigarette.

"Well, the first part of the fight is over," he remarked.

"I'm glad it is only the first, because I sure want some more," Drury shot back.

"Fine. Some other time. And I hope under conditions which will be more to your liking."

Drury tried to stammer in answer, but could only stare into the twinkling eyes and finely chiseled, deeply tanned face.

"Look here, damn you, why are you keeping me like this? I reckoned this would be a finish fight. You are playing with me like a lousy, mewing cat."

"It will be a finish fight," Sugg answered suavely.

"Then what are you holding that muzzle

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to my nose that way for? Are you bluffing?"

"I am not going to throw it on you, Mr. Drury, because you are too good a man to kill."

Drury replied with a volley of oaths.

"You are afraid to kill me. I don't want bouquets; I want fighting."

"You will get it. I am going to keep you for fighting. As I said, you are too good a man to bump off. When I kill, Mr. Tom Drury, I want an audience. I want men to say 'This is the man who killed Tom Drury—Tom Drury, who was the greatest bronc peeler that ever gentled a horse.' If I killed you now and left you here no one would find you for weeks—months—except, of course, the coyotes, and they would take their time about appreciating you; they generally wait from four days to a week—"

"What the hell are you going to do, Mr. Gila Monster?"

Sugg stepped back, paling.

It was the first time Drury had actually accused him. Until now there had been a chance that Drury only suspected him of being in the Gila's gang. This was the first knowledge Sugg had that his man actually realized he was dealing with the Gila himself.

"Look here, Mr. Man, you must not accuse me like that. Let it be definitely understood that I am not the Gila."

"You lie. You are."

"No, I don't lie. It must not be said anywhere that I am the Gila. The identity of the Gila must at all hazards be kept a secret."

"It is not a secret. I know you yourself are the Gila."

"I am asking you to take that remark back, Mr. Drury."

"No, I will not take it back. You yourself are the Gila. When you say you aren't you are lying."

"Very well, then, you will regret what you've said," Sugg concluded calmly. "I am going to punish you in a very just and definite way." His mouth broke into a beautiful smile. He seemed pleased with the extraordinary patness of his judgment. "Your punishment will be this: I under-

stand that you have just come to the city. No one knows who you are, except that you are supposed to be a Texas cowman. Wouldn't it be just, since you have accused me of being the Gila, that I merely turn around and accuse you of being the same thing? That's an eye for an eye, if ever there was such justice in the history of this range."

"You are going to accuse me!" Drury's face bore an incredulous grin. "A hell of a chance!"

"We shall see."

Drury was disarmed. The gun he had carried, and on which were carved the initials of Jennie Lee's father, together with the cartridge belt and holster of carved and studded leather, was claimed by Sugg as the first and most important part of the victor's spoils. The next was the sombrero, with its band of beaded Hopi legends.

The outlaw, keeping up his constant flow of banter, condescended to leave his victim a surprisingly vital part of his outfit—his food.

"And in case you get thirsty in your long walk," he added, "you can finish up this red-eye of mine." He gulped down a swig and tossed the flask upon the duffel bag which he had untied from the cantle of Crater's saddle. There must have been a reason for the outlaw's leaving this food and drink, for there was enough to last his victim a good long journey home. Drury did not think of this at the time. His ear caught a much more important word in Sugg's last remark.

"You say 'walk'?" he cried voicelessly.

"You must remember that if I left you your gelding you would be able to outdistance me—and in any direction you chose."

The full significance of his plight struck home to Drury as he watched the rider lope off, puffing thin wisps of smoke from his cigarette. Crater, who had been snubbed to the pommel, loped after, preferring the company of the blood bay to remaining behind with the man who had mastered him.

"At least," Drury consoled himself, "if he rides Crater he will be killed."

But Sugg betrayed no intention of trying

to ride him. He galloped leisurely across the plain to the north, until the light mist of alkali slowly turned his form into a gray silhouette and then erased him entirely from view. The little cloud moved away, purpling and fading over the crest of the mesa.

CHAPTER VII.

THE THREE-HEADED HENCHMAN.

RIDING his blood bay and still leading the big outlaw Crater, Henry Sugg covered the thirty miles of desert which lay between the mesa and the mountains. Well over the range, he came into the limitless and desolate plain which was his own domain.

At sunset he arrived within sight of a shake hut and a little corral. In the latter a pinto and two burros were feeding from a hay rack. Sugg waited. As the darkness deepened he took out an old mask of black velvet, which he slipped over his eyes. He tied his felt hat by its leather chin strap to the saddlehorn, and then put on the sombrero which he had filched from Tom Drury, pulling it well down over his ears. It was the big yellow hat with the band of beaded legendary, the most conspicuous part of Drury's outfit when he performed his broncho-twirling exhibition in Cattleoe the previous day.

Having effected these two changes in his costume, Sugg rode leisurely toward the shack, reined in his horse when about fifty feet from the door, and by the use of two fingers breathed out a low, husky, hissing call.

The pinto seemed to know this whistle. He threw up his head, stopped his munching, and cantered down to the end of the corral. Crater and the blood bay neighed a welcome which the pinto answered. A moment later a man came out of the hut.

He was undersized and foxlike, with red, bristly hair and a sunken face which had been badly disfigured by burns. His costume was composed of a ragged, lop-brimmed hat, a black shirt with shoulder holster slung over it, a pair of khaki overalls, and big hobnailed boots.

This hunched, sinister little figure peered furtively into the dark, and when he saw the looming form of the other man, mounted on a blood bay, he slunk immediately to the corral to saddle his horse. He threw a ragged blanket over the chafed, sore back of his mount, and with one movement of his arm swung the saddle from its peg. Then, vaulting onto his seat, he rode down toward the masked figure.

Sugg wheeled his horse and rode down the trail, keeping a distance of twenty yards or more between himself and the ragged pinto and rider whom he had summoned.

A half an hour's ride brought the two over the shoulder of a mountain and into a long, deeply gorged cañon where a tangle of beams and uprights marked the opening of a forsaken mine. Sugg rode through the thicket of mesquite which had grown over the mine's waste and, dismounting, crept to the collar of the shaft, where he repeated the same whistle by which he had summoned his first follower.

Again a horse, tethered near the gallows of the shaft opening, was the first to respond, shying back as far as his rope would permit him and pricking up his ears excitedly. Presently a Mexican shoved up a board and scrambled through an opening just small enough to serve as an exit and entrance to his well-concealed "home."

Saddling and mounting his horse, he cantered down the steep incline of the waste, and when he had reached the trail below he found his master galloping off in the darkness.

In single file the three men crossed the cañon, skirted the hog-back mountain, and entered a granite gorge which, despite the growing starlight, was as pitch dark as a cave. Here Sugg repeated his whistle. The sound, low as it was, hissed and echoed through the great rocky chasm as if it had been uttered within a marble hall. Immediately there was the echo of pawing hoofs, of champing, and then an answering whinny to the neighing of Crater and the bay. The jingle of spurs and the retch of leather came to Sugg from the darkness, as if there were men and horses scarcely a dozen yards away. In another moment a rider appeared. He was a tall scarecrow of a negro

riding a little rangy mustang and wearing a torn sombrero, a shoulder holster, and bearskin chaps.

Sugg beckoned to the little man who had been the first to join the gang.

"Now, then, Slinkey, you're going to lead this raid," Sugg commanded. "All orders from now on will be given by you. The nigger and the Mex will obey you. I'll ride along separately, and if there's any sharpshooting necessary I'll join in."

"Where are we headin' for, chief?" Slinkey Driggs asked.

"The Lingo outfit."

"We've already rustled the place clean. Hell, there ain't nothin' left of the outfit exceptin' a rangy crop of calves half eaten up by maggots! What ole Lingo could scrape together for a beef herd he sold a day or two ago."

"That's the reason for this raid. He hasn't been able to put his wad in the Cattleoe Bank yet, because of being too late Saturday. He's got his little fifty-dollar bills in a safe, thinking he'll bank 'em tomorrow, and it's up to you to make him admit it."

"Marty Lingo won't admit nothin', chief. And I ain't a good enough talker for to persuade a man he's got a lot of bills hidden away in a house. I'm liable to get stammerin' any minute."

"If you find yourself stammering, whistle," Sugg replied, "and I'll start the shooting."

"I reckon Marty Lingo will mind my whistlin' more'n my talkin'," Driggs admitted.

"You ride up to the main ranch-house at eight. The nigger backs you up. Andres will set fire to one of the corrals—any one, it makes no difference; just one large enough to help the atmosphere—"

"The atmosphere?" Slinkey asked, puzzled.

"Just so Marty Lingo will know he's got to cut out arguing."

"I'll see to it, chief. Eight o'clock, you say—and you'll be on hand in case I get to stammerin'."

A long, easy canter brought the little band to the eastern edge of the plain. Here they trailed up into the hills of drought-

resisting forage which marked the transition between the civilized country about Cattleoe and the Gila's kingdom of crime.

The desert starlight soon cast a blue glow over the rolling prairie country, and the gang came precipitously upon the site of Marty Lingo's cattle ranch. Sugg circled the little group of barns, bunk-sheds, and corrals, and disappeared in the chaparral and hog-wallows of the opposite side. Slinkey Driggs, who was acting as his lieutenant, called the remaining two members together. The three men did not make a very agreeable picture as they sat on their horses, leaning on pommels, waiting for eight o'clock to approach.

The trio was as dangerous as it was hideous. Audacity, sneak-thievery, and murder was represented in this three-headed bodyguard of the Gila Monster. The Gila, in fact, had picked his fellow bandits with a canny precision. Each one was a master in his own line, and the three together made a finely balanced posse of criminals equal to any task the master set for them. To meet the Gila and his band was like meeting an animal like the Chimera or Cerberus, which, failing to win the fight one way, could strike twice again.

Probably Slinkey Driggs, an ex-convict, was the cunningest of the three. Although a condemned murderer, his trickery had won him his freedom. In a California penitentiary he had been locked in solitary confinement and clothed in a red shirt instead of stripes, to denote that he had previously attempted to break prison. It was at San Quentin, on the edge of San Francisco Bay, that prisoners were set to work in a jute mill. Driggs, while in his condemned cell, set fire to a piece of cloth and stuffed it through the floor so that it dropped into a storeroom littered with the matted hair and sacking of the mill. In the excitement of a fire Driggs gambled on making his escape. This was how he played his game habitually. He had the cunning, but not the cowardice, of a fox.

Driggs's little red head reached scarcely above the waist of the giant negro, who was called Black Spudds. Spudds was the brawn of the gang. It was said that he had fought a grizzly in Idaho, and had gone into

a Wild West circus under the title of the Bear Bulldogger. This was perhaps merely part of the legend that Henry Sugg liked to foster about his henchmen. That Black Spudds had killed a man in a prize fight, however, was well known. He steered clear of the States of Idaho, Nevada, and Utah, and was gradually heading south, leaving a long wake of brutal crimes.

Andres, the Mexican, was the best shot of the gang, and the interpreter. Half Mexican, half Yuman, he was the most effective agent for keeping the greaser and Indian settlers in a constant fervor of hate against the Americans. It was by means of this big, ever present, ever growing conflict that Sugg, his master, could kill and rob with impunity, and Andres—leader among the Mexicans—was the intermediary.

At the appointed hour this little gang—this three-headed beast—crawled through the mesquite and chaparral surrounding Marty Lingo's ranch, and made its onslaught. It was an onslaught backed by power—the power not only of the six-shooter and of cunning, but of something more invincible: the curious methods of the Gila, which worked up a raid so that its victims would be left helpless with fear, as helpless as some little woodmouse or horror-stricken rabbit which sees a boa constrictor advancing upon it.

CHAPTER VIII.

LINGO BOWS TO THE FEAR-SWAY.

SLINKEY DRIGGES, keeping the giant negro as his own personal bodyguard, sent the other bandit to the rear of the Lingo outfit to set fire to the winter calf-sheds. Then, after dismounting and leaving their two ponies in the bearbrush across the county road, Slinkey and the black walked up toward the main ranch-house.

The latter stayed somewhat in the rear, holding Slinkey's holster and gun, with the understanding that he should advance at the moment he considered most opportune. The contrast in the sizes of the little foxlike Slinkey Driggs and his African had been known to work wonders in other raids.

The usual ranch dog barked at Driggs's arrival. A stumpy, withered man appeared in the yellow light shining from the open front door. Marty Lingo was past middle age, his brown eyes set much too close together in his long, sunburned face. When he saw the hunched tatterdemalion who had stepped up to his veranda part of the anxiety faded from his face. He took on the challenging assurance of a little spaniel who has a bone to guard.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"I'm a peace-lovin' man, Marty," Slinkey Driggs replied with the more subtly challenging air of a friendly cat. "I know you—every one in the county knows you, Marty. But like as not you ain't never seen me before."

"No, I don't reckon I have. What is it you want?"

The ranch people by this time were curious to see the stranger at their threshold, and, accordingly, two women poked their faces over Marty's square shoulders. One was a wrinkled and sun-faded woman, the other old and bleary-eyed. Behind the latter stood a lanky youth with a serious, flushed face, a shock of yellow hair, and an important Adam's apple.

Marty Lingo, the two women and the overgrown youth were all apparently aware of the seriousness of this visit—the proceeds of their winter's hardship, the spring roundup, and the visit to the shipping station with the beef herd were at stake. Every man who came near the ranch that night—and until the money could be taken to the Catteloe Bank—was to be looked on with the utmost suspicion.

"It's been a damned hot day, Marty," Driggs wheedled, "and I'm right tired and dusty."

"Where's your horse?" Marty asked suspiciously. "And if you hoofed it, how is it you got this fur without no grubstake and no gun?"

The two women seemed relieved to have these points brought to their attention, and the lanky youth smirked his disgust at the littleness of Slinkey's body.

"Don't be scared of that little seedwart, Marty!" the youth laughed. "If he wants any trouble I'll twist his haid offen him."

"Oh, I don't want no trouble, mister—I don't want no trouble. I'm a peaceful man, and—"

"Well, who are you? What's your business?"

"What's yourn?" Slinkey snapped back suddenly.

"I'm a cattleman—and I ain't figurin' havin' hoboos callin' on me after dark."

"I ain't a hobo."

"Then what are you?"

Slinkey had a definite answer to this. It was a card which would swiftly show the sort of hand he intended to play.

"I'm a sheepman!" he rasped out. "That's what I am—a sheepman."

"Well, then, damn your scurvy hide, what are you comin' to pay a social call on me for? This is a cow outfit?"

"I'm the flockmaster for a outfit over thar by Mount Diablo. I got sheep all around here, and they're nibblin' away every bit of forage for ten miles all about you—"

"Well, then, damn it, get outen here! I'll grind your bones up with me hands. I'll—"

"And me, too," said the youth, who edged his way in front of his wrinkled old mother. "I'll pull your haid offen you like you was a chicken. I'll—"

"I'm goin! I'm goin!" Slinkey replied quickly. "But afore I go I want to make a little remark about them sheep of mine. If you-all ack friendly like I'll call off my sheep. I'll find pastures over on the other side of the mounting. But in order that I know you-all are goin' to ack like my friends and agree with me that a peaceful life is the only life, I want for you to give me a little friendly gift—"

"Which will be a broken jaw—"

"Which will be a mashed, lousy carcass left of a damned ornery, nervy pup!" cried the youth.

Marty stepped out of the door to the edge of the veranda, squaring off with double fists, when he noticed something which made him melt palpably. Behind the little foxlike, grinning Slinkey the huge form of a negro loomed in the darkness. This was the psychological moment that Black Spudds had chosen to present himself.

Drigges saw the changed expression on Marty's face, as well as the transformation that was laughably obvious in his whole posture.

"Which will be a broken jaw, eh?" Slinkey mocked. "Which will be a mashed carcass, eh? Hell, no! I'll say which it will be! I'll say it will be some money!"

Marty Lingo paled, and the two women retreated with voiceless cries into the house.

"We want your money, Mr. Marty Lingo," Slinkey repeated. "And we want it just as a little gift. There ain't goin' to be no raidin', no shootin', no nothin'. Just a promise from me that I'll take my sheep off and your range won't be eaten away."

"If them two birds think they'll get our money without a raid and without no fight," the lanky youth cried, tearing himself away from the arms of his old woman, "I'll show them! I'll fight 'em! They's only two of 'em, and we'll fight 'em, Marty. Let's show 'em!"

"No, no! Just a minute, Mr. Man!" Slinkey cried without stepping down from the veranda. "Let me come to an agreement with you first. And you, too, Mr. Lingo. You give me every dollar of the money you got for your beef herd which you sold up to the shippin' station, or I'll show you the next card that a sheepman plays when argufyin' with a cattleman. And if you don't think I will, let this here boy with the Adam's apple chokin' off his wind take another step up to me. Let him do it, and you'll see the kind of game we sheepmen play."

Having snapped out this challenge, the little gunman put his fingers in his mouth and emitted a shrill whistle.

"You ain't sheepmen!" Marty cried. "I know who that nigger is. It's one of the Gila's gang. You're murderers, every one of you, and before you get a cent of my money I'll—"

"I'll show 'em myself!" the youth cried. He shoved away the old woman who had been hanging to him and took a step toward the little mocking bandit. From the indefinite darkness of the chaparral across the county road a flash of light and a sharp report answered the youth's bragging.

Marty saw that neither the little hunched figure on the veranda nor the giant negro behind him had drawn a gun. He saw also that the lanky youth who had defied the challenge of the Gila's ambassador crumpled up in a ridiculous heap upon the veranda.

The two women rushed from the seclusion of the house and kneeled down by the boy.

"Now, then, ma, I ain't hurt—it's only a crease! Go on fightin' the damned—"

Marty, fired by anger as well as the words of his younger companion, shouted out:

"You ain't goin' to get a cent of our money, I tell you! Not without you come over my daid body!"

"Help us with the kid, Marty!" his wife cried frantically. "They's men in the chaparral all around us! Come in before you get dropped at our feet!"

"If you want to fight, take a look first at your barns," Slinkey advised, pointing to the rear of the ranch-house.

A brilliant red light was pulsating above the structure, throwing great wagging shadows across the corrals. Some of the ranch hands from the bunk-house were calling to Marty that his calf shed was burning. Cows were stampeding out into the open.

For a moment the ranch owner found himself vainly yelling out a denial to the little grinning man in front of him, and at the same time trying to think what he could do in the midst of a scene of the wildest confusion.

"I won't, damn you! Shoot us all! The Vigilantes will make you pay for this!"

"Think of your womenfolk, Marty!" his wife called frantically. "Give them what they want. It's better than having the whole place wiped out."

Marty paused in his string of oaths. In the middle of the county road a masked man stood. Marty caught just a glimpse of the big yellow sombrero, the black face, the eyes glittering in the reflection of the burning shacks.

"It's no use!" he cried despairingly.

He realized that his ranch was burning down, his stockmen running every which

way, screaming at each other, calling to him, and some, who caught sight of the tableau being posed in the front of the ranch, running panic-stricken for their shot-guns.

"Bring out the money, woman!" Marty called, raising his hands. "Don't shoot me, you damned murderers! You'll get what you want. But I'll swear to God this is the end of the Gila and his gang! Old Peter Gaunt and his Vigilantes will ride to-night if there's a man in the county alive to tell them of this damnable trick."

Ten minutes later Henry Sugg again mounted his horse. Still leading the black Crater, he conducted his victorious gang into the mountains behind the Lingo ranch. His men followed him as usual in a widely extended single file, with Slinkey Driggs leading. When well into the fastness of the mountains Sugg, still masked, waited for his lieutenant to catch up to him.

"Here is your share of this loot," he said. "And here is the money to be divided among the other two. Don't follow me any farther, as I have other matters to attend to. To-morrow morning I will meet you—"

"Where, chief?"

"It must be near. I am not riding back into the desert to-night. We will meet in the Eastern Gap."

"The Eastern Gap?" Slinkey repeated. "That's gettin' close to civilization, chief."

"But no one rides through there now—not since the Jackson brothers were bumped off. Go back and tell the men we will meet at the Eastern Gap."

"All right, chief, but—"

"That's all."

Slinkey shook his head, then wheeled his horse and rode back to the rest of the gang. Sugg watched them, little black insect-like figures moving against the bare adobe hill-side under the starlight. When he was assured they had completely disappeared he turned his horse and rode down again to the Lingo ranch.

The outfit was still in the wildest confusion. The stray cows were being punched up, bawling calves penned in a corral, and men were still beating down the smoldering remnants of the fire.

Sugg skirted the outfit until he came to a small box cañon on the eastern side, the only opening to which was a dry creek bed which cut directly through the ranch grounds. Under the protection of the thick chaparral, as well as the darkness of night, Sugg was able to sneak into this little gulch. Here he untied the halter of the big gelding he had been leading, lashed him with the end of his latigo, and watched him kick up and then gallop away toward the top of the cañon.

With the assurance that the horse would not wander out of that gulch without passing directly into the corrals of the Lingo ranch, Sugg rode out of the canyon, mounted the steep adobe banks of the creek and again skirted the upper corrals, keeping himself constantly hidden in the brush. When he had approached as near to the outfit as he dared, he took the big yellow sombrero with its brilliantly beaded band and threw it sailing into the air so that it fell directly into the outermost corral.

Having accomplished these two little deeds, he turned his horse for the trail which cut across the grazing grounds lying between the Lingo ranch and the city of Cattleoe.

In Cattleoe he hoped—if his bay was capable of the speed and endurance it had shown in other races—to be the first one to tell Peter Gaunt of the atrocities which had just been committed at the Lingo cattle outfit.

CHAPTER IX.

PETER GETS HIS POSSE.

JUST before Sugg arrived at the Eldorado Hotel, Peter Gaunt was taking his "nightcap" of sherry before going to bed. Jennie Lee was trying to pass away the time in the sitting room of the little suite reading a novel. She knew that she would sleep little that night, particularly after the exciting evening she had spent listening to the conversation of her grandfather and his cronies.

Needless to say the conversation centered about Tom Drury and his vow to rid the range of the Gila Monster. Most of

the cattlemen and townspeople who visited old Gaunt that night seemed to consider the vow as the unfortunate boast of another doomed man. Drury would go the way of old Sheriff Horner and of the United States Marshal who had been killed by some of the Gila's henchmen. Days would pass, perhaps searching parties would be sent out, and finally when the incident was all but forgotten, bits of evidence would be picked up here and there. Perhaps a body would be found. Clews might point to some renegade Hopi who had disappeared across the border. It was the same old story.

But this time there was one person who nursed a conviction that Tom Drury would succeed. It was Jennie Lee. Perhaps it was the romantic dreaming of a girl who had seen a man—for her sake—pit all his skill and strength in a life-and-death fight against an outlaw horse. At least Peter Gaunt took that view of her convictions.

It was thus when Sugg rode into town, driving his exhausted horse up to the Eldorado Hotel and asking to see old Peter Gaunt, that Jennie Lee suffered a violent awakening.

The Cholo servant ushered Sugg into the sitting room where she sat.

"This is a great pleasure," the visitor began obsequiously.

She cut him off smoothly: "I suppose you came to see grandfather?"

"Yes, and of course—"

"I will call him."

"I have news about the Gila."

She had stepped to the door, but now she paused suddenly. This word had caught her as effectually as if Sugg had with his usual dexterity flipped a lass-rope over her shoulders.

"The Gila!" she cried, turning. "Then you have news about Tom Drury?"

"Perhaps. The Gila raided Lingo's place to-night. A man was shot—"

"Not Tom Drury?"

Sugg paused in the act of rolling a cigarette. He studied the girl's anxious and beautiful face with every mark of approval. It was the first time she had lifted her face to him so unreservedly. Her brown eyes had darkened almost to black, because of

the dilated pupils; her hair under the artificial light was turned to a silken, Titian red, and her cheeks were softened to a delicate velvet pallor.

"Tom Drury's bragging unfortunately did not succeed in frightening the Gila. Another raid has been accomplished as if nothing had been said."

"But is Tom Drury safe?" the girl demanded.

"You seem concerned in a very peculiar way for the safety of this man. He is a stranger, you must remember. None of us know who he is or where he came from. If I might be so bold—"

"Don't say anything against him—he has shown himself to be a very generous and a heroic man—"

"Not yet—"

"What do you mean by that?"

"How do you or I or any of us know who this man is? A stranger riding into town purporting to be from some out-of-the-way ranch down in Texas? Perhaps. At least before you call him a great man and heroic and generous—and surrender your heart to him—"

"I don't want your advice, Mr. Sugg. I know where to surrender my heart. And I know why you are belittling this man to me."

"Because I am jealous."

"All right, if you want to admit it. I would not have said it."

"But I am. You know that I am jealous of any man who'd so much as smile at you. You know that I am in love with you—that I—"

"You came here to see my grandfather?" she reminded him calmly.

"To see you—first. To ask if you will wait—only a little while before you put all your faith in this—this stranger from Texas. I beg you to wait to take my warning—"

"Sometimes it is not necessary for a woman to wait. Some men are bad at first sight—and some are good. I have my convictions about Tom Drury, and there is no single doubt."

"Perhaps not now. But later, we shall see."

"I will call my grandfather."

When Peter Gaunt came in, his granddaughter did not accompany him.

The old ranger wore a plush embroidered dressing-gown of a style twenty years or more out of date. He was surprised at the dusty, bedraggled appearance of his visitor who on all other occasions had appeared immaculately dressed.

"Looks like you been doing some hard ridin', Sugg," Gaunt remarked dryly.

"What's wrong?"

"It's time for you to call the Vigilantes together, chief," Sugg replied. "There's been another raid—and one done as slick as ever—Marty Lingo's outfit."

"The Gila?"

"Undoubtedly. A stocktender told me about it while I was riding on the road from Lingo's to town here. The place was partly burned down. Young Dick Holser was potted—"

"Killed?"

"Don't know that—potted anyway. And Marty Lingo's roll gone."

"Hell! It was his money for his beef herd. He's worked like a slave all winter—and so has his womenfolk!"

"Are you going to let it go?"

"Like hell!" the old man roared. "I'll ride out to-night. That's what I'll do! We'll get the whole gang together—"

"And the sheriff?"

"The sheriff be damned. It'll be the Vigilantes and nothin' else. But what more do you know? Where'll we ride to? It'll be the same old wild-geese chase!"

"Not this time, chief. I think I've got a little clew. While I was riding on the county road below Lingo's place I saw four riders cutting across for the desert mesa. One of 'em was masked and riding a black horse which as near as I could make out was giving him trouble. The stars were shining and I couldn't see anything more except that suddenly the old nag took it into his head to buckjump. Don't know why. Must have been just a low ornery horse. And it sure did do some cake-walking. Damned if it wasn't as bad as the fight that outlaw of yours put up against Tom Drury here in town. The rider stuck on a while and his three companions passed him riding like hell—"

"It was the Gila's gang. He always rides with them three men!"

"Sure it was the Gila! Well, chief, I hid in the brush and watched that horse throw his rider flat and then gallop like mad up toward the box cañon behind Lingo's place."

"And the rider?"

"He started to foot it across the desert toward the big mesa. If his companions don't come back for him he'll be taking a good long walk, I'm telling you. And if you get your Vigilantes together, there is a chance we might get over there to that mesa before sun-up."

"It's a slim chance we could find him," the chief said. "His men will most likely come back for him—"

"They aren't overly fond of him, chief, I'll tell you that. And they know Lingo will be raising a howl all over the country about his money."

"It's a slim chance," Gaunt repeated, "but we'll take it."

"At least we might find the horse he was riding, chief," Sugg suggested enthusiastically. "And who knows but that might give us a clew."

"We'll ride," Gaunt decided. "And we'll comb the whole range this time, all night long, and all day to-morrow, and from then on until we get this bird and his whole murderin' cutthroat gang. And I'll tell you this, Mr. Sugg, and you can tell it to every one—that I ain't goin' to bring the outlaw back for a trial. I'm goin' to finish him up proper and turn his body over to the sheriff. There ain't goin' to be no jury nor no judge settin' over this bird. Unless it's a coroner's jury—and the judge will be myself, Peter Gaunt!"

"That's talkin', chief. How about my riding through town and rounding up a posse quietlike for you?"

"Just the Vigilantes. Remember that, Sugg. With clean guns and with cayuses that will stand desert travel. None of their stall-fed saddle horses. Tell 'em to meet out at Donkey Bluffs two hours from now."

Sugg clanged across the floor and hurried out to perform his mission. When he was gone Gaunt immediately called his granddaughter and told her of his decision.

"Grandpa, if you are going to risk your life on this hunt, I am going with you."

Peter Gaunt called his Cholo servant, ordered his riding outfit, rifle, holster, and six-shooter, and started to pull on his jack-boots.

"Little gal, you make me laugh. This here ride I am going on ain't going to be no fox-hunt for little ladies like you."

"You have said yourself that you were too old for any more desert riding, grandpa. I am—"

"I am going with the best posse in the country," Gaunt interrupted. "There will be Gaskin and Blowfly Jones, and Marty Lingo himself will join us when we reach his ranch. It's going to be a finish fight."

"Perhaps I will never see you again, grandpa, if I let you ride away like this. Think of the chances against your coming back."

"My dad never thought of chances." Gaunt clamped his holster on over the big frock coat. "This here is one time I am going without no hesitation. When I meets up with the bandit I am going to make sure he is my man and then I am going to ask him to look up a tree without the advice of no judge nor jury nor sheriff. No hesitatin' for me! I've been too cautious. From now on you'll never hear folks say the name 'Cautious Peter' again. And look here, gal, don't worry! I promise you one thing: I will send a rider back to you in the morning to let you know how things are going with me. And when we meet up with any of the Gila's gang I will let you know the result, which is that we have pulled off the tight-rope act and are bringing the remains home."

"If I can't come," the girl said, "I want you to promise me, if, when you are riding over the range, you should come across Tom Drury, and he is in trouble—"

"Tom Drury?" old Gaunt repeated almost as if he had forgotten the name. "That damned braggart? All right! All right! I'll help him—the damned four-flusher—since you have set your heart on his being a bona fide go-getter, which he ain't, I will help him."

"And let me know about him, grandpa. He might be wounded. He might be dying.

If he said he was going to get the Gila it means he will fight him when he sees him. I am afraid now that he has seen him. And perhaps lost out in the fight. Otherwise he would not have let these terrible things happen. I am afraid he is in trouble."

"Forget about him, gal, and forget about the danger to all of us. Pray for us, if it'll do your heart any good. I ain't figuring on any prayers getting us better horses or cleaner guns, so you don't have to ask no help from on high for me and my men. All as I want is that the Gila don't have no prayers on his side."

The Cholo servant came into the room and announced to Gaunt that his horse was saddled and ready.

"Damned if I don't wish I had a horse like Crater to ride," Peter said as he kissed his granddaughter good-by. "And damned if I don't wish I had that there six-gun with the single action."

"Tom Drury will use them!" the girl cried. "Remember, grandpa, when you see him I want to know—"

"I will remember, gal."

Half an hour later Peter Gaunt was well on the road toward Donkey Bluffs. In the starlight he could see horsemen trailing across the plain in every direction and concentrating on the point where the posse was to form. The first of the Vigilantes to join the chief was Henry Sugg.

"Mr. Sugg," the chief said as Sugg drove up to him, "when the Vigilantes is all mustered, I'll be asking you to lead the way to where you seen that there bucking horse!"

"Look here, chief," Sugg replied, "I've been thinking hard since last talking to you, and I've come to the conclusion that the buckner I saw was your own outlaw, Crater."

"The hell you say!"

"Mind you I'm not certain, chief. It was starlight and I was hiding in the chaparral. But the way I've been figuring is this: What if that horse *was* your buckner? Isn't there a chance that fellow Tom Drury who came into town as a stranger—giving out that he was from Texas—and—"

Gaunt interrupted:

"I'll be damned!"

"Nobody knows Tom Drury, chief, and as I was given to understand by the barkeep at the Eldorado, he finally refused to take a guide into the desert with him—"

"Yes, I heard that, but—"

"This Gila is supposed to lead a double life, chief, and—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" old Gaunt interrupted. He was silent for a moment, during which he bared his silver hair and scratched his head pensively. "I'll be—"

"You get my point, chief?"

"Tom Drury—a stranger—my outlaw buckner!"

"That's the first little ray of light, eh, chief?"

"I'll need a hell of a lot more light to see clear, Mr Sugg. And I'm goin' to play plumb cautious." They waited for the posse to gather, and as they waited Gaunt mumbled repeatedly to himself: "Well, I'll be damned!"

CHAPTER X.

DRURY AWAKES.

THE greater part of the night Tom Drury had been trudging doggedly toward the east.

When, during the previous afternoon, he had been roped by Henry Sugg and divested of his horse, hat and gun, he set himself immediately to the almost hopeless task at hand. He emptied the duffel-bag of its heaviest contents—the cans in particular, saving enough for a few days' hike. Although his throat was choking with thirst, he was determined to save the whisky for his supper. He could have eaten nothing without it. Tying the duffel-bag over his shoulder after the manner of a knapsack, he started out with a steady gait toward the eastern crest of the mesa, where in their morning's ride they had passed the dry pool.

The sun had beaten down heavily upon his head that afternoon. The only protection was the big bandanna he had tied pirate fashion about his forehead and ears. As he tramped on, fortified against nausea by big chunks of raisins, and fighting his thirst

with a constant dragging at tobacco, night came, and the desert was more merciful. The walking was slow because of the mesquite, and the pony trails, which were mere furrows of sand, afforded scant help.

In the earlier part of the night he stopped by a clump of barrel cactus—the last hope of water for the desert-traveler. Here he built a fire. There was no use traveling in secret now. If the Gila himself already knew where to find him, there was no other danger to avoid. He crushed water from the cactus pulp, sucked out the drink and then fell to his supper of fried potatoes, boned ham warmed over the fire at the end of a pronged stick, and a good gulp of whisky. He finished his meal with Baker's chocolate and more drags of his cigarette to numb the thirst-tortured nerves of his mouth. After this he slept.

From side to side he tossed in the warm sand, disturbed by vivid dreams, the call of coyote and wail of the wind. When he opened his eyes he stared into a sky brilliant with starlight. For a while he felt free, because the sight of stars over him as he lay on his back for a night's lodging was a familiar and homelike thing. He had ridden night herds in just such lonely fastnesses with the same tang of mesquite in the air, the same touch of the desert wind turned suddenly cold, but still redolent with the odor of sage, greasewood, and spice-tree. He felt free, but he knew that he was not. He knew, as he thought over his situation clearly in the stillness of the night, that he was as much a prisoner as if the Gila had put him behind bars. The outlaw preferred imprisoning his men in a desert to holding them in cabins or cellars. For the latter he could be blamed as a kidnaper, a brigand. For Drury's present plight the desert could be blamed. And the desert was more inexorable than iron bars.

From then until just before dawn the Gila haunted his dream. Part of the time it was a real Gila Monster crawling into his life: a hideous, splotchy, red lizard with square, black snout. A lizard which poisons, not with poison glands, but with the decayed animal stuff tucked in behind its teeth.

Drury shuddered at the thought and squirmed restively.

Henry Sugg's wind-tanned face was smiling at him—not grinning, but with a pleasant winsome smile which sharpened and broke to a gleam of teeth. Sugg was wily, suave, soft tongued, crafty.

"He will not kill me himself," Drury grumbled. "He will send others to kill me."

He dozed again, rolling over and cursing because of the burn of his neck. "But damned if I won't go on fighting. I've just begun! He's left me everything to fight with—my life—my hands! Thinks he can rope me and corral me in his desert! You made a mistake, Gila Monster, leaving me my life and my bare hands!"

He jumped up with a start. Then, feeling again the soft, cool wind with its pungent, delicious scent of sage, he came to himself. The stars were above, as at any cow camp on the plains in riding night herd. He wished fervently for the distant song of cowboys quieting a mill of steers, but there was only the doleful wind, and all about him in the light of stars and the gray dawn he saw forms like tree-boles or pronged cactus.

Drury stared. He laughed softly to himself. A cigarette rolled, the flare of a match and a few drags; then he stared again.

Yes, they were "forms." He could not remember if there had been pronged sojuara all about him. There had been barrel cactus, from which he had crushed a bitter, soothing drink. But there were no forms like giant mushrooms. The tops of the mushrooms were sombreros. He looked from one to the other and they moved. Some were crouching. He shrugged his shoulders with a sort of hopeless abandon.

"I knew he'd send them after me. Damned lizard, afraid to even pot me with his own hand! All right, gents, what do you want?"

"We want you, Mr. Gila Monster."

For a moment Drury was convinced that these forms surrounding him in the gray glow of dawn were apparitions. And, furthermore, the voice that had come low, cool, steady, had said a most confusing thing.

Drury recalled his dreams of Sugg. Sugg was the Gila, there had been no doubt about that. But here was a man speaking for a group of tall, silent, waiting figures, accusing him of being the Gila.

Then a flood of light came into his confused, sunheated brain.

Sugg's parting words had been that Drury himself would be called the Gila.

"Don't put your hands into your pockets agin for tobacco," the same voice came out. "Gestures of that sort ain't considered overly polite—particular when the chief of the Vigilantes says to a man, 'Mr. Man, I want you!'"

"Are you the chief?" Drury shouted out.

"I am Peter Gaunt, chief, and this here is my posse got up as a escort for to do military honors during the ceremony which we are about to perform!"

"If it's honest-to-God you, Peter Gaunt, I'm thankin' my lucky stars. My life is saved. Step up and take me, chief. Put the cuffs on me. Anything. So long as I smell leather again and feel the sweat of a horse, I'm praising God!"

The men began to close in cautiously, so that Drury could see the grim mouths under the jet-black shadow of the sombreros.

"Watch out thar, men. I don't want to have no gun-throwin'. And he'd drop a few of us afore we could get him. You seen how he handled Crater back in town!"

"Then you do know who I am!" Drury laughed.

"Damned right."

Peter Gaunt stepped forward while a half dozen barrels were focused on Drury's head.

"There you are. It's all right now, men. I played cautiouslike. We could have dropped him. But Cautious is my name!"

Gaunt hitched a few knots of a lariat about Tom's hands, and an audible sigh of relief escaped from the men, as if for all that time they had been holding their breath.

"Now, then, Mr. Bronc-peeler. You're finished. You came into town and shined up to my little gal and busted old Crater and snorted around like you was one of our

leading citizens! But your game didn't work, Mr. 'Cowboy from Texas'!"

"I tell you I *am* from Texas, and I—"

"And this here posse is from Missouri," the old man shot back. "I always did hear the Gila was supposed to be masqueradin' about as a leading citizen—but I never knew he give out that he was a cowboy from Texas. That's a good one!"

The rest of the Vigilantes, now that Tom was roped, joined in a much heartier laugh.

"Well, Mr. Cowboy, we got a little Texas cattle hoss for you-all to ride," Gaunt announced.

"I'm laughing at you, Peter Gaunt!" Drury said. "You're pulling off something here that 'll make you the laughing stock of the county the rest of your life."

"I reckon so."

The gang joined again in a hearty guffaw as they went down into the gulch to get their mustangs. Every man among them was a formidable-looking figure in the dawn. Each one wore shoulder holster as well as cartridge belt and a gun on the thigh. Some of them shoved up their sombreros to wipe sweat from their foreheads; others lit cigarettes, the flare of matches illuminating red, stern, bristling jaws.

Drury reflected that this crowd had evinced enough caution when first surrounding him to show that they were playing no joke. He was convinced that every rider there thought he was the Gila. Henry Sugg had played his game—whatever it was—with a consummate skill.

One man of the posse Drury had not yet seen. It was the man who had remained in the gulch with the horses.

"Sheriff," Drury said, "I'll tell you now—and prove it by half a dozen different ways—that you've got the wrong man."

"We didn't expect you to admit you were the Gila when you've succeeded in keeping it a dead secret for ten years."

"Take me to town, chief, and I'll get half the population as witnesses."

"Take you into town—wow!"

The other riders voiced their astonishment at this suggestion. "Whoop-ee! Take him to town! Zowie! The hell of a chance!"

"And why not?"

"They'd lynch you before we passed the first ranch house!" Gaunt exclaimed. "And I never give up my man once I got him. I act cautiouslike. No lynching. Cautious is my name."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. But if you aren't going to take me to town, where do you intend riding?"

"Nowheres. We'll take you up here in the hills where my dad used to string up his catches."

"And a trial?"

"A trial?" This was also the subject of exclamations—and laughter.

"If you take it into your hands to string me up without a trial—that's lynching. Your caution isn't going to help me much."

"No, not much. But I'm plumb cautious just the same."

They came down into the gulch where the horses were waiting. It was then that Tom had his first glimpse of the man tending the horses.

The glimpse shocked him, as if he had seen a man step out of his dreams and appear suddenly in flesh and blood. It was as if a horrible malignant spirit had incarnated itself into something not of its own world. And yet when this first qualm of puzzlement and fear was conquered, Drury saw the whole truth of his situation in a flash. And the truth, simple as it was, did not relieve him. It stupefied him.

The glimpse he had was swift, indelible; it came and went with the flare of a match. The man was lighting a cigarette with a maddening nonchalance, and the light, the highest color in the whole scene, fell upon the smiling mouth, the dark, olive-colored cheeks, the blue jaw, the black shining eyes of Henry Sugg.

CHAPTER XI.

DRURY SEES HIS CRIMES.

AS the men mounted their horses Drury turned to Peter Gaunt:

"Look, here, chief, you can't let a farce like this go on: I'm not the man you want. You know I'm Tom Drury, the man who came into Cattleoe and broke your horse, and made a vow to get the Gila.

Well, the Gila's caught, chief, and if you give me time I'll prove to you that I'm innocent and that the man you want is right there!"

Gaunt answered without so much as looking over his shoulder at the horseman Drury was accusing. "You are the man we want," he said. "Your talk is no good. The case is absolutely slick and there ain't nothin' under the sun or moon that 'll help you."

"But I tell you you've got the Gila! I can prove it! There he is—"

This time Gaunt glanced back at the man at whom Drury pointed. Henry Sugg was suavely smoking the cigarette he had just lighted. It did not appear that the accusation of this desperate man could in the slightest degree disturb his equanimity.

"Who in the hell are you pointing at?" Gaunt asked.

"At Henry Sugg. I'm swearing to you before God, chief, that the man you want is Henry Sugg! He took me into the desert, and—"

The Vigilantes burst out in a roar of laughter. If this was the way their prisoner intended to prove his innocence there could be no further doubt in their minds as to his guilt.

"Like as not he's been drinking sojuarosap." Henry Sugg laughed, turning to his horse and mounting. "If he's got a hallucination like that, chief, I'll say it don't bother me in the slightest. How about taking him directly over to Marty Lingo's and seeing if we can't clinch the case against him?"

Gaunt thought a moment before leading his posse down the trail.

"Look here, Mr. Gila Monster," he began, turning to Tom. "I said there ain't the slightest ghost of a chance that we're wrong in this here business. But I don't want for my men here to see me bust right off into a lynch party without a second thought. They call me Cautious Peter—and I reckon, after all, that ain't such a slouch of a name. At least, my old dad who hanged your forbears wasn't called a lynch judge. And I don't aim to be called one, neither. I'll tell you what I'm goin' to do: I'm goin' to take you over to Lingo's outfit, as this here Henry Sugg suggests,

We'll get what evidence we can concernin' the raid you pulled off last night and then we'll give you a regular trial up there in the little town behind Lingo's, where in the old days my dad acted as sheriff and hanged you birds. I'll promise you this much, since you're plumb down and out: we'll stage a regular trial up thar, a peaceable one, and then hang you after the trial. If that don't suit, cork up and don't let me hear another word from you till we get there. And, lookee here," the old man added as he turned his horse down the trail, "if you go accusin' any more of us bein' the Gila, I'll hang you first and have the trial after!"

They jogged on for a while without further remarks. The jingle of spurs, the retch of leather and the intermittent beating of the hoofs against pebbles covered the silence.

Finally the chief turned to one of his Vigilantes, a loose-jointed man with popping, red eyes and bulging face muscles, who had the reputation among his companions as being a braggart and something of a coward.

"Look here, Clout," the chief said, "I reckon now that the danger's over we can do without you on this here expedition, so I'm goin' to send you with a message to my gal."

"Better send two of us, chief," Clout Gomery suggested. "If I'm ridin' alone I might meet up with this here Gila's gang. They're liable to be hangin' around somewhere, waitin' to snipe-shoot us."

"I reckon you can handle three men with that thar six-shooter, Clout," the chief said dryly.

"I reckon perhaps so, chief, but—"

"And when you get into Cattleoe," Gaunt went on, without heeding the objection, "tell my gal that we seen the enemy and he's ourn."

"The sun's up," Henry Sugg remarked, laughing. "You can make the trip safe enough with the sun up, Clout."

"All right, chief," Clout said, swallowing uncomfortably as his gaze went across the lonely desert. "If I get to Cattleoe I'll tell the gal that you seen the enemy and he's yourn. Is that all, chief?"

Gaunt dropped back to Clout's side and lowered his voice.

"She wanted to know something about Tom Drury, Clout," he said. "And I promised I'd let her know. Tell her that Drury himself is the Gila and that when he come into Cattleoe day before yesterday he was masqueradin' like."

"I'll explain it to her, chief. I got a good way with wimmenfolk."

Gaunt spurred his horse and again took the lead at the head of the little posse, riding by Drury's side.

"We'll stop at the Lingo outfit," he remarked. "And after seeing in broad daylight how you messed it up last night, maybe you won't have the face to deny who you are."

"Never heard of the Lingo outfit," Drury protested.

"And I guess they wished they'd never heard of you."

The Lingo ranch was a good two hours' ride from the mesa, and to reach it the riders cut northward over the sage plain, the first rays of the sun casting long shadows of horses and men over the flat, sand spaces. As they cantered up into the rolling foothills which bordered the north of the desert, Drury had his first sight of the cow farm.

Around a shabby, unpainted, sun-warped ranch house were grouped an indiscriminate bunch of calf-sheds, bunk-houses, and barns. Of one of these, Drury observed, little remained but a charred black skeleton. The whole outfit, in fact, seemed to be in serious disorder. Hog-tied fences were smashed through, tangled strands of cattle-proof wire were all that remained of some of the corrals, and ranch-hands stood about hatless, idle, dazed.

"Now, then, men," the chief said to his posse, "keep your shotguns handy. Stay in your saddles. And play cautious. I don't want no mob violence."

The ranchmen came down through the corrals to meet the chief. For the first time Drury looked upon the long head and woeful, narrow-set eyes of Marty Lingo.

"Well, we got your man for you, Marty," Gaunt announced. "And it's the first time the Gila was ever took."

Lingo glanced up furtively at Tom

Drury, who was seated in his saddle with bound hands laid across the pommel, his head and ears still swathed in the pirate-like bandanna which he had put on the night before.

The ranchers behind Lingo held back, staring, with every mark of awe written on their wrinkled, sun-reddened faces.

After his first moment of speechlessness in the presence of this famous "brigand," Lingo looked about at the shotgun deputies surrounding the prisoner and presently found his tongue.

"Chief! He's done this job up brown—just like he done it over to the X L outfit. My best ranch-hand is shot and the money I got for my herd has went!"

"He's got to hang!" another rancher cried.

"He'll hang, all right," the chief assented. "But I want for him to hang legal-like."

"Lynch him!" a third burst out. "Lookee what he done, chief! The barn—poor Marty had to borrow money on his beef-herd to put it up and look at it now—like a bunch of black cactus over thar."

"Sure!" Marty broke in. "And my vaquero, Dick Holser—"

"I ain't forgettin' him," Gaunt put in.

"He's in the house with the ole woman, chief. Plugged proper. If the doctor from Cattleoe don't shag out'n here in a hurry, they's liable to be another death chalked up to this gunman."

"Lynch him!" one of his companions repeated. "Tain't only money he's responsible for, but lynch him for what he done to old Widder Holser's boy!"

"Give 'em a tight-rope party, chief, here and now!" a burly cowman yelled out. "Remember, chief, the whole countryside's with him. He'll get off yet!"

"Now hold on, gents," Gaunt objected. "I agree with you, he's got to hang for what he done. But I want to see everything done calm and orderly. They ain't to be no mob violence while I'm chief of the Vigilantes. If you-all are afraid my prisoner will get away, then get your cayuses and your six-guns and come along with me. I grant you every one's goin' to be satisfied. But no mob stuff. If they's

any lynchin' it's got to be done by me. I won't have it said of ole Peter Gaunt that they's any lynchin' goin' on in his county without his consent."

"You're doing this business right," Henry Sugg put in. There was a marked contrast between his calm, oily voice and the excited husky voices of all the others. "Don't by any means take him back to the city."

Drury, instead of breaking into a thunder of oaths, checked himself. He was pale with anger; he decided to bide his time.

Little Marty Lingo took off his sombrero and scratched a moist bald head. "If you want us to get our saddle hosses," he remarked, "I take it you're goin' travelin' with this bird before you stage the hangin'?"

"Just travelin' fur enough so's our hangin' will be a peaceful one," the chief decreed.

"And that 'll be where—in Cattleoe?"

"Hell, no! If I took this gent to Cattleoe there'd be a mob fight in the middle of the street, and it's too long a journey besides! I'm goin' to stage the hangin' right away, and I'm ridin' up into the mountains here to them little forsaken shacks which used to be called Desolation. In that thar town we'll administer our own justice without the city folks and judges and mayors messin' in."

"Or the Gila's own men attacking you before you could get back to the city," Henry Sugg reminded him.

"I reckon a hanging at Desolation would be satisfactory to us all," Marty Lingo said, seconded by the group of ranchers at his side.

"And afore we hit out for the trail," the chief added, "I want for you to bring all the evidence as you've got ag'in' this gent, because when we get to Desolation I'm figurin' on pullin' off a regular trial."

"Evidence!" Lingo cried. "Is there any doubt about this bird?"

"Absolutely not. But you cain't have a trial without you have evidence."

"But you can have a hangin' without evidence!" a ranch hand brayed out.

Marty Lingo interrupted the argument,

"I ain't askin' for a lynchin'; chief, despite the wrong done me. I'll offer a bit of evidence, and it's all any low-abidin' man would want for to convict this here road agent. We got his horse. It come wanderin' down the creek last night from the box cañon up behind my barn."

Gaunt and Henry Sugg exchanged palpably significant glances.

"Bring the hoss along," ordered Gaunt. "When we get to Desolation we'll start off our trial introducin' the hoss. We'll call it Exhibit A."

Drury listened to this argument with a glum, stoical interest. The fact that Peter Gaunt was protecting him from an immediate lynching gave him hope. For the time being he decided to keep quiet. Every one was convinced of his guilt. Perhaps if he waited until the arrival at Desolation he could think up a convincing defense. A few faked-up exhibits he was certain would give him a chance to show the mockery of the whole case. Even this horse they were talking of could be used not as a proof against him, but as a proof of his complete innocence. His horse, he could easily point out, was Crater, an outlaw he had broken in a city lot before a mob of people.

The chief waited for the return of the ranchers who had gone for their mounts and guns. Drury looked toward the barns expectantly to see what sort of a horse they were going to foist upon him as his own.

When he saw what Marty Lingo led out of the corral he realized with a shock the full seriousness of his position. Sugg, the Gila, had played his game with unbeatable, almost uncanny, perfection. The tremendous power, the trickiness, the merciless irony of the Gila and his methods were revealed to Drury in one flash. His case from then on, he knew, would be practically hopeless; he had bucked something too indomitable, too mighty.

Snubbed to Lingo's pommel was the big gelding Crater. When it was brought to join the troop of horses it passed close to the prisoner. Old Crater did not look up at the man who had mastered him. Instead he let out a snort, partly of disdain, partly of distress.

"Let me ride the old horse," Drury said.

"And lead us a chase into Californy?" was the chief's laconic answer.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ACCUSED.

DRURY came to the conclusion that, although the chief was objecting strenuously to a premature hanging, he was in reality merely "saving" his prisoner for a mock trial and a private lynching. He recalled the fact that Sugg, not satisfied with disarming him and leaving him helpless in the desert, had actually used his horse as a piece of damning evidence.

The hat, of which he had been deprived at a time when a hat was most needed, would probably be used as another undeniable proof of his guilt. The fact that he had been left in the desert under the boiling sun without his hat was apparently a secondary condition with his persecutor. It appeared that Sugg wanted to use the hat as one of the strands in his deftly cast net. No sooner had these thoughts come to Drury's mind than little Marty Lingo called one of his vaqueros, who held in his hand a big sombrero with beaded Hopi design.

Old Gaunt took the hat, twirling it on his upraised forefinger. "This here sombrero, gents, will be Exhibit B." He turned to Drury. "I reckon you-all will be needin' this durin' the rest of our ride up to Desolation," he said. "The sun will be beatin' down hot toward noon."

Drury set his jaw, resigning himself for the moment to the grim fate which was enveloping him. As he thought of this second dastardly trick of the Gila Monster he felt that his fate was inescapable. It was the same feeling he had had the day before when he saw the noose of the lass-rope poising above his head.

Just before the posse started on its ride into the mountains Lingo's wife came out of the ranch-house, followed by the mother of the wounded vaquero. Both were pale, sun-faded women, broken by the life of the ranch. Marty's wife was grim, with a set look of triumph on her mouth as she stared

up at the dreaded prisoner. But the old mother, a wretched wisp of a woman, was weeping.

"Now go back and tend to that boy that's wounded," Marty ordered. "We don't want no women bawlin' about this here lynching party."

Marty's wife held up her fist to Drury.

"I ain't bawlin' about you, murderer that you are! It's about us I'm worritin'. How can you repay us by hangin' up on a sycamore limb? How can you pay the drudgery I've went through? You've ruined us—and you've shot up our men! And you've killed the cattlemen all about us as wants to keep law and order! It's only the cowards you let go on livin' their lives like desert rats in holes. But *we* weren't cowards! We fought ye! We showed ye! And you're payin' now!" Her voice mounted to almost a scream. It drowned the words of her husband, cursing at her, begging her to be quiet. "I will tell him! I will say what I want!" She broke down, whimpering: "But the money—the money that was to keep us goin' for another year—is it too late? Is it lost? Can't we get *some* of it to start buildin' up agin'?"

Marty swore loudly as the posse gathered reins to start.

"Can't you do one good deed—the last—and let us start agin'?"

The chief, who disliked scenes in which women played emotional leads, shrugged his shoulders and clucked to his horse, bidding Drury to follow. Drury had listened to every word of the woman's railing. Her vehemence was so cutting that he felt a strange sensation, almost inexplicable, coming over him. He felt as if he had actually committed the crime himself. Such was the directness and the power of her accusation.

"Cheer up, lady!" he called out over his shoulder. "Remember that the Gila's kingdom is crumbling. If I have anything to say about it you'll get your money back, even if it's hidden away as far as Mexico."

The ranch wife's companion, an older woman, clutched at the reins of Drury's horse before he could turn to follow the chief.

"He shot at my boy and hurt him!" she

cried. "He was a big, brave boy, and he fought them. *He* wouldn't let them touch a poor ole woman like me! He fought them, and they hurt him, and he's lyin' in there, sufferin'."

She stared up at Drury, and her eyes, which had been bleary and sullen, seemed to slowly clear until they were burning coals. "You killer! You yellow coyote! You are the one that robbed a poor ole woman of the only thing she's got! My son! If my son dies I'll come to you and I'll kill you."

"There now, ole mother!" Gaunt remonstrated. "Don't get all wrought up and tremblin' thataway. It ain't going to buy you nothin'! You're tremblin' and tearin' yourself to pieces."

He took her arm, which she had raised against Drury. In her hand was a revolver.

"The varmint! God will punish him for what he done. If my boy dies God will 'get' him. The Gila can't get away from Him—no, ye can't!"

"He can't get away from me, either, Mother Holser," Gaunt said proudly. "We're goin' to string this here bird up right after we give him a trial, and then we'll round up his gang."

"If your boy dies, Mrs. Holser," Tom Drury said, "rest assured he'll be avenged. The Gila is going to pay for these wrongs."

The old woman stared into Tom's face. For a long moment she looked, blinking as she faced the sun. The fire in her eyes seemed to soften, or else to change color to something perhaps warmer, but certainly not so piercing and dreadful. She clung to the chief's arm, her hands shaking, partly with palsy, partly with exhaustion. A big tear trickled down the furrow of her cheek.

"We must be ridin' on, Mrs. Holser," Gaunt said. He turned to Marty and the ranch hands. "You men follow us up to Desolation. We'll want you up thar for witnesses. I want all of you, for, as I've always swore, you cain't have a trial without you have witnesses."

The posse hit out for the Desolation trail. A short ride, loping and walking, interspersed with breathing spaces, brought

them well into the foothills. Here it was that they found a road, rocky, gutted, overgrown with chaparral and greasewood—formerly a trail for prairie schooner, stage coach and pony express rider.

Gaunt and his prisoner led the procession, and the troop of Vigilantes followed

two by two. Then came little Marty Lingo on his calico horse, and behind him his ranch hands mounted on stubby cow ponies. At the rear, his blood bay fretting itself into foam in its desire to break ahead with the leader, rode Sugg, calm, smiling, smoking wisps of cigarettes without ceasing.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Life-Raft

by

F. Gregory Hartswick



THE justice of the Supreme Court dangled his legs in the Atlantic Ocean and regarded the coming of dawn pensively.

"It's going to be a hot day," he remarked to no-one in particular.

"I know it," snapped the doctor, irritably. He removed the jacket of his py-jamas and stood erect, clad only in the lower half of his sleeping apparel. "There's one comfort," he went on more calmly. "We'll be dry, at least." He wrung out the dripping garment he held in his hands.

The young man who had been traveling for pleasure yawned. "I'm going to sleep," he announced. "Somebody watch me and see that I don't fall overboard. Didn't get a wink last night. I had three aces going in when she struck, too. In another five minutes I'd have—oh, well, I didn't, so why worry?" He composed himself for slumber. The doctor looked at his sprawled figure.

"Our involuntary companion seems to

have gone overside dressed pretty much in what he could grab. It's a wonder he kept afloat at all in that overcoat. Well—" He looked about him. The morning light was coming swiftly up out of the east. In the dawn-glow the vast ocean stretched about the three men, empty and flat except for their unstable speck of safety. "See any of the boats?" inquired the justice of the Supreme Court.

"Not a boat. She went down so fast that I doubt if many got away. It's one of God's own miracles that this life-raft floated loose, and another that I found it in the dark. I was pretty nearly all in when I heard you yell. How did you get on it?"

"I was asleep when we struck, and didn't get to the deck till she was pretty nearly under. I must have lost my head, for I never looked for a boat. The tilt of the deck did it." He shuddered at the recollection. "When a man wakes out of a sound sleep and hears crashing and screams all around him, and then rushes onto a deck

that's been as level and true as a floor for four days, and finds that surface, which he's come to depend on, slanted at nearly forty degrees—"

"I know," said the doctor. "I felt the same way."

"Well, anyhow, I jumped and started swimming as hard as I could. I used to be a pretty fair swimmer when I was younger, but I'll bet I broke my own record. I heard the ship go down behind me, in the dark, and there were shrieks and gurglings—" Again the justice of the Supreme Court paused and covered his face with his hands. In a moment he had recovered himself. "I kept on swimming blindly, and all of a sudden I came right on the raft. I hit it so hard with my hand that I think I sprained my wrist. I climbed aboard and rested, and then yelled at intervals till I heard you in the water. That's all till we picked him up." He indicated the young gentleman who had been traveling for pleasure. "The next question is, what do we do?"

Morning had come full upon them while they were speaking. The sun flung fiery darts across the levels of the sea, gilding the crests of the long leisurely swells and making deep jade shadows in the hollows. The doctor and the judge stood on the gently rocking life-raft and scanned the ocean. Not a sail, not a smoke-cloud. The immense watery plain was unbroken by the faintest sign of hope.

"What's that?" cried the doctor. "Look—wait till it rises on the swell. There! See it?"

Riding the gently heaving water, about two hundred yards away, was a black object, apparently a spar, with a curious-looking lump attached to it in the middle. At the doctor's cry the lump moved and waved an unmistakable human arm.

"A survivor! He sees us!" The two men waved frantically. The young man who had been asleep, aroused by the noise, leaped to his feet and joined them. The spar with its human freight moved slowly toward the raft.

"He's swimming and pushing it," said the doctor. "Why doesn't he let go? It'll take him forever to get here at that rate."

"Maybe he can't swim. Is there a rope on this craft?"

The judge found a small coil of rope attached to a corner of their unwieldy ship; he waited till the man on the spar had struggled within distance, and flung the line awkwardly, but with sufficient accuracy, to drop the end of it across the spar. The survivor reached it and deftly made it fast to his support; then he slipped free and with long, smooth strokes swam to the raft. In a moment he had hoisted himself aboard and lay panting on the narrow deck.

The three men looked at their new passenger with interest. He was a man of middle age, apparently; his dark hair, dripping though it was, still was crisp and curly. He was naked, having evidently discarded his clothes for greater freedom in swimming, and his body, glistening in the sunlight, showed rippling muscles indicative of great strength. In fact, he almost immediately recovered from the exhaustion of his swim, and, sitting up, looked at his rescuers.

"I know you," he said suddenly to the doctor. "You're Dr. Savage, the psychiatrist. I saw a good deal of you on ship-board."

"You did?" The doctor was plainly puzzled. "I don't remember—how did you escape?"

The man ignored the question. "We seem to be the only ones who did get away," he said calmly. "I won't deny that I was very thankful to see your raft. I saw it an hour ago, and I've been trying to push that spar along ever since."

"Why didn't you yell?" demanded the doctor. The new arrival's calmness seemed to irritate him.

"Needed all my wind for swimming. You weren't moving, I was. Why waste the breath?"

The judge came to the rescue.

"Gentlemen, I am not quite certain as to the social demands of a situation like the present," he said lightly. "However, in order to escape the dreadful fate of Gilbert's unfortunate castaways, who couldn't speak to each other because they hadn't been introduced, let me say that my name is Delavan—Thomas Delavan; I am a justice of the Supreme Court when I am at home.

This gentleman"—he indicated the young man who had been traveling for pleasure—"is Mr. George Hamilton, of New York, recently at the same table with myself in the saloon. Our common friend, the doctor, you already know. And now might I ask—"

The naked man rose and bowed.

"I'm glad to meet you, gentlemen," he said. "My name is—Summers."

The three men started. The doctor spoke first. "Summers!" he cried. "Summers, the—"

"Correct!" broke in the other. "Summers, the murderer, traveling free of charge from the country whence he had been extradited to the country where—" He checked himself. The young man broke in.

"But—but I've seen you on board! You were always with that detective—what's his name—Craddock! Where's he? How did you get away?"

The murderer smiled cynically. "When the ship struck last night Craddock and I had a little argument. He wanted to handcuff me and get me into the same boat with him. I objected. As a result of my arguments he decided to remain behind in the cabin while I went on deck. Unfortunately, I had taken some little time to convince him of the undesirability of his course, so when I reached the deck I was alone. I went overboard with some things which are at present attached to yonder spar. And here I am."

His listeners shrank back in horror. "You mean to say you—killed him?" said the judge at last.

"I don't know whether or not he was dead when I left him," retorted Summers. "But I am fairly certain that he is not among those present now. And now suppose we stop talking about the past and consider the present—and more particularly the future. Has any man here a suggestion?"

The others were silent. In some strange way the murderer, naked and an outcast from civilization though he was, had dominated their spirits.

"I thought not," said Summers, still with an evil smile on his face. Then he turned suddenly on young Hamilton.

"You!" he cried sharply. "Haul that spar aboard!"

Hamilton, amazed at the suddenness of the attack, hesitated. Instantly Summers stood over him, menacing, terrible.

"Haul in that rope!" he thundered. "You know who I am! By Heaven, I could kill the three of you with my bare hands—and I will if you don't jump when I speak!" He curved his powerful arms, and the muscles stood out like ropes. "Haul in that rope!"

Hamilton hesitated no longer. He pulled at the line which the fugitive had made fast to the spar, and presently the dripping stick of wood was close alongside. Summers waved Hamilton away and reached to seize the bundle that was lashed to the spar near the middle. With a deft twist he loosened the knot, and holding the bundle under his arm, pushed the supporting timber off. Then he rose and confronted the others.

"You three," he said with withering contempt, "represent the forces of law and order. You're strong when you number yourselves by the million; you lean on each other for support, and when anything out of the way happens you yap for help like a lot of whipped dogs. When the help doesn't arrive you curl up and quit. Last night you came face to face with one of the elementals—you met death, and the result was that Nature's laws superseded your codes and regulations. There was a struggle for existence, and in that struggle, as you know if you've read anything, only the fittest survive. You civilized apes! Not one of you is a man—but I am! You, free and belonging to the ruling classes, lost your heads the moment you were faced with a real crisis. What did you come away with? Your lives and that's all. I am a murderer, according to your classification; I am outside the pale, a being to be hunted and destroyed; I was a prisoner—your prisoner. To-day your laws are not worth the paper they're written on. The fittest will survive. Look!"

He spread the cover of his bundle—a waterproof slicker—out on the deck, and displayed its contents.

"One flask," he said in the manner of a man taking an inventory, "containing

brandy; useful should it become chilly. One automatic pistol, loaded. I congratulate myself on the job of packing. It appears that the water has not harmed this specimen. However, it's well to be sure." He pointed the weapon into the air and pulled the trigger. The pistol spat flame; the echoless report was curiously not loud in the level stillness. "And *that's* all right. Next, one bottle of spring water. My erstwhile guardian was particular about his drink, an idiosyncrasy for which I thank his spirit. That's all, except a tin of crackers and a couple of boxes of bouillon cubes; packed watertight, as you observe. I regret that I had not time to make larger inroads upon the supplies of our late friend the steward. However, it might be worse." His manner changed abruptly. He was no longer the suave showman. "There are nine shots left in this pistol. I could kill you all now, if I chose—and I *will* kill you when I do choose. But not just yet. You!" He leveled his automatic at the judge. "Take off those pyjamas and give them to me!"

He was obeyed in silence. At another word of command the young man who had been traveling for pleasure shared his garments with the divested jurist.

"I could leave you naked to the sun, if I chose," said Summers. "But I need your services at present." He paused. His glance swept the ocean about.

"There seem to be some sticks floating yonder," he went on, indicating a point where the rise and fall of the swell was flecked with debris. "Hamilton, suppose you swim out and bring some bits aboard—long ones for preference?"

Under the threat of the pistol the young man dived off the raft. A few strokes brought him to where the floating splinters marked all that remained, save the raft itself, of last night's disaster. He soon returned, pushing before him a shattered oar and a slender plank.

"That's good," commented Summers briefly. "Now the rest of you get busy and rig a shelter with those poles and this slicker. There's enough rope, I think. I want something to keep the sun off me."

His orders were obeyed. The three men

were utterly cowed by the dominating personality of this killer. The shelter, inexpertly made though it was, seemed to satisfy Summers. He crawled under it and lay, shielded from the sun and in a position where he could watch every move the others made.

The three victims of his tyranny crouched uncomfortably in the growing heat. They were beginning to grow thirsty. But Summers had the precious bottle of water at his elbow, and none of them cared to dare certain death in the effort to reach it. The man in the shade of the improvised awning read their glances and laughed.

"You'd like some water, wouldn't you?" he sneered. "Well, you'll get none. The fittest is going to survive. The only reason I'm letting you live is because I may need you for something else. You'll get nothing to eat and nothing to drink—I'll tell you that now."

The doctor spoke. "Suppose you drive us too far? Suppose we refuse to do what you wish?"

Summers laughed. "Not you! I know a little about psychology, doctor. The will to live is too strong. You'll hang on till the last possible minute, and you'll do what I tell you as long as you can stand. While there's life there's hope." Again he went through one of his curiously characteristic changes of manner. His tone became lightly conversational. "Lucky thing it's calm, isn't it? If the wind should come up I'd have to kill you all, you know. This raft wouldn't have room enough for all of us in a storm."

The day glowed pitilessly toward its close. With the fall of evening the three thirst-tortured men felt a little relief. Summers had refreshed himself guardedly during the heat of the afternoon: one biscuit and one swallow of water was the limit of his allowance to himself. As the dark deepened and the brilliant stars appeared—the night was moonless—Summers was moved to speech, his words during the day having been confined to the issuing of orders and curt refusals to several demands for water.

"You poor, civilized fools!" he said. "Why don't you jump overboard and end it? You haven't a chance to live, and you

know it; but you prefer to hang on and be tortured by thirst and hunger and the sun for another day and maybe another. I don't think you have the stamina to last longer than that. You'll probably attack me some time during the time of your sufferings, and then I'll shoot you down. But I've decided not to kill you outright. I'll cripple you. You represent to me the ineffectiveness of the sheltered world of men when deprived of their fellows. You are particles of a mass; as a whole I will admit that you are almost irresistible; you accomplish your purpose clumsily, ponderously, at a frightful waste of energy and time, but you do accomplish them. However, when you are isolated a higher law than your mass-manufactured statutes comes into play—the law of Nature, gentlemen, the law of God—the law of the survival of the fittest. You are not fit to live in the conflict with Nature; hence you will presently die. I have opposed men all my life; hence Nature is kind to me. I will live. Man is Nature's enemy, and when he strays from his protecting works she strikes him down without pity, except those favored ones who have it in them to best her in the only way she can be bested, which is by scorning the protection of the mass and living boldly to oneself.

"I am strong—you are weak. When an emergency arose you looked around for some of the servitors you have trained to wait upon you at the expense of your natural initiative; failing to find your servants ready at your call you were helpless. I have fended for myself all my life, and when the moment came I was ready. I met opportunity halfway. The result—well, I am free, I have food and water, I hold three lives under my hand to do with as I will—to make serve me, to amuse me, and finally to destroy at my good pleasure. Bah! You are contemptible, you three.

"You, a judge, ordained to sit over your fellows and mete out what you call justice! Who put you there? The very men whom you strip of their possessions by a stroke of a pen, or deprive of freedom and even life. The poor, pitiful, helpless mass must needs choose some one of themselves to say what they shall do, and say and think! And you,

doctor—the one to whom the silly sheep people run when they have broken Nature's laws and don't know what's the matter with them! You are what you are because men haven't enough sense to live as they ought to live. Men have become what you call civilized; that is only another way of saying that they have thrown overboard the laws of temperance and moderation, which are the only laws of health.

"As for you, Hamilton, you useless cumberer of the earth, I have more respect for you than I have for either of your far more respectable companions. You are a nothing, a cipher; but you don't assume to be anything else. You are an idler, and that is something I can understand, because even an idler can be genuine. Those others are shams. There is room in the world for idlers, and if circumstances were slightly other than as they are I would say to you, 'Go in peace, so that you promise to keep on idling.'

"And now, gentlemen, I have said my say. There will be sleep for no one this night. I will see that you stay awake. I am stronger than you, and can do without sleep for hours longer than you. Later, when you are exhausted, I will allow you to sleep, and will sleep myself, secure in the knowledge that you are helplessly sunk in slumber. Thus I assure myself safety from medicine, the law, and leisure—the three worst enemies of natural man."

The night wore through somehow. Not for a moment did Summers relax his vigilance, and did one of his wretched victims nod he was upon him with kicks and curses, while the other two watched, helpless against the murderer's ready pistol. Another dawn streaked the ocean; the water changed from black to the green of pine groves, then lightened to foam-flecked emerald; the sun tipped the swells with splendor; another day was upon the survivors.

The three victims of Summers's tyranny were in wretched plight. Since the vessel had struck they had had no food or drink; after their labors they had not been permitted rest. Their lips were cracked, their throats consumed as with flame; their eyes seemed sunk inches deep in their heads. Summers, too, showed the effects of lack of

sleep; but he had had water, and was in much better condition. He looked at his companions in the swiftly growing light and laughed.

"Still all here?" he said. "I had an idea that perhaps one of you would get tired and slip overboard during the night. The will to live is a strong thing. Well, here's another day! I think I shall breakfast."

He helped himself to a pair of biscuits, and took a temperate pull at the bottle of water. It was still three-quarters full, the three noted. The doctor felt a savage impulse surging in him. He would fling himself on that mocking devil; he might be killed, but before he died he would have one swallow—just one delicious draught that would cool his throat and soothe his swollen tongue. With an effort he steadied himself. He must hang on. Hang on—for what? More torture, more suffering. Was it worth it? He looked at his companions; they were in as evil a plight as himself. It seemed vain to keep living, to fan the spark of existence merely to prolong agonies already almost past bearing.

Suddenly his mind cleared. He found himself looking at the raft and its passengers, himself included, almost impersonally, as he would regard a case brought to him for diagnosis. And as a patient's symptoms indicated the trouble to be met, what he saw brought its own solution.

"Summers!" he cried; and at the sound of the authority he had summoned to his voice the murderer, crouched in the shadow of his awning, started and swung to face him with ready pistol and a snarl on his lips.

"Summers!" repeated the doctor. "Give me that pistol."

"Give you—you must be crazy!" Summers's finger trembled on the trigger. "You make a move and I'll—"

"No." By an almost superhuman effort of will the doctor made his voice calm and steady, though each word brought a pang of racking pain to his throat. "No, don't shoot. You will give me the pistol because you want to live. You have not escaped the man-made laws of which you spoke so lightly. You say you will survive us because you are the fittest to survive. You

are stronger; you have control of the supply of food and water. But you cannot survive us by many hours.

"We are on a raft in mid-ocean. If we had been cast ashore on an island where there was a chance of wresting life from the soil you would undoubtedly have been the last man alive, and might even have flourished, for you are fitter than we to tear from Nature the living she so grudgingly parts with; but you are not on an island. Nothing but the mere brute will to live has made you treat us as you have. You would have known, if you had allowed yourself to think, that there was no hope for any of us; that the possession of that bottle of water and those biscuits could at the most prolong your life but a few hours. When they were gone, what did you plan to do?"

"For a moment you saw yourself in the position of the primal man, living because of his power over his mates, and as such you dominated us. But you have not considered the future. That is a function of civilized man, not of the brutes with which you are so anxious to ally yourself.

"Look there and there!" The doctor's outflung hand carried Summers's gaze with it, and he saw what the awning had hidden from him—a cloud of smoke on the horizon in the south, and another farther east. He sprang to his feet with a snarl of rage; but the doctor's words flowed on in a torrent.

"Those are not chance steamers that may pass us!" he cried. "Those steamers are hastening to this very spot, brought by the wireless summons that went out before our boat sank. They know the latitude and longitude; we have not drifted appreciably; they will be here in a few hours. Civilization, Summers, never left us for one instant. The day of the primal beast has passed, and man rules supreme! You are no longer the strongest of a group of animals, holding possession of the means of existence; you are a man like us, and subject to our laws. Give me the pistol!"

The judge and young Hamilton were staring amazed at the tableau of the two men. Their attention, which had been distracted by the sight of the approaching rescuers, now swung back to the immediate

vicinity. They looked at Summers and forgot their hopes and sufferings in amazement at the transformation he had undergone. His personality, which had radiated easy confidence, had now shrunk to a sort of trapped expression of fear; his lips were drawn back over his teeth, his free hand was clenched into a convulsively working fist. His whole attitude indicated a beast driven to corner and prepared to fight to the death.

"They won't get me alive!" he gritted. "I'll plug you first and save a shot or so for the boat's crew that tries to take me off—and one for myself at the last. Stand back!"

But the doctor faced him calmly.

"The will to live, Summers! You're not a rat in a corner—you're a man. You will surrender peaceably, because you believe that by hiring the best legal talent when

you return to New York you can escape the electric chair. Remember, Summers, you are in civilization again."

There was a moment of silence. Then the man crouching under the awning changed once more—his last metamorphosis, from the triumphant primate down to the abysmal brute and up again to the status of a man among men.

"You win, doc," he said with a grin; and his very voice was devil-may-care. "You've got the goods. Here you are." He tossed the automatic into the air, caught it by the barrel and presented it to the doctor. "And now, folks, let's split what's left of this water. I'll take a little brandy in mine, thanks."

A long hoot from the nearer of the two steamers indicated to the castaways that they had been seen and that rescue was at hand.



East is East

Part III

by

T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright."

CHAPTER VII.

THE EMPTY SADDLE.

TOWARD morning a rack of clouds out of the east brought a chill rain on the riders, and far to the west the moon sank among the peaks. At last it went down, looking as if it had been blown into fragments and was lost amid the peaks and hurrying clouds.

Jimmy Million shook from cold. His light silk costume was wet through. The purr of the rain in the trees overhead added to the melancholy. Presently the Targui, who sat invisible upon the white blur of his stallion, called his companions to halt.

Jimmy drew down his bay.

"Are we close to Nalaczi's?" he shivered.

The American saw Goombah slide to the ground across the white body of his stallion.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 22.

"I don't know," he burred; "it is near morning."

Jimmy got to the ground with painful stiffness. The insides of his legs were very sore. He shook as if he had Arkansas malaria.

"Whu-what have we s-stopped for?" he chattered.

"For prayers, *m'sieu'*."

Million looked at the dim form.

"P-prayers wh-while we're ch-chasing women?"

"Are you ill?" guttured the Targui.

"Nun-no. Go ahead. Are you gug-going to pup-pray here?"

"A little further on, *m'sieu'*, where there is water."

A master shake seized Jimmy.

"Wuh-wuh-water?"

With a grunt of affirmation Goombah moved forward in the darkness, and Jimmy followed the dark form by sound. The white stallion also dropped in behind the raider, but at a word from Goombah the animal stopped. Twelve paces distant his white form was lost in darkness.

The footfall of the men was muffled in wet leaves. The rain fell monotonously and with an increasing chill. The sky was a frayed and hurrying dun. The thought of praying in the rainy night, the thought of walking to some particular spot for water and there to pray in the rainy night filled Jimmy with sour amusement. "What a superstition," he thought. Presently he found himself on a surface of stone whose western side gave the American a sense of void. Rain and wind whipped about this exposed point.

The man from Ouarglum paused.

"Here it is, and over here is water if *m'sieu'* wishes to bathe."

The thought put an extra quiver into the entomologist's shrinking body. He tried to decline, but made only a chattering. He heard the Targui grope his way to where a gurgle of water sounded amid the whisper of the rain. He heard him put sandals aside and the splash of his ablutions. Then he saw the tall inky figure return, kneel toward the East and begin a prayer in Arabic.

Million stood with shoulders hunched. He could hear drops of water trickling down

his back. But presently some feeling for the weirdness of the murmuring brown man came over him. The night-shrouded mountains, the peculiar desolation of the moonset he had just witnessed had its effect on the American's mood. The man from Ouarglum was praying. An odd impulse came over the entomologist to join him. Like most American men Jimmy never prayed nor even thought of prayer. So this impulse aroused a queer self-consciousness. He glanced around in Feggy's direction, with a guess at how the little man would take it. The cockney was now barely visible and seemed lost in some reverie.

Million considered it another moment, then knelt awkwardly, almost experimentally in the drizzle. His knees were instantly soaked through. Not a notion of worship came into his head. The chill rain contracted his shoulder muscles into painful knots. The wet stone bruised his knees. There was no prayer in him. But in this venerable attitude, a loneliness came upon him. The black mountains around him and the hurrying sky above him were empty. He knelt to emptiness. There was something appalling about it. He could not pray. But he seemed to grow smaller and smaller among the dark mountains, until he was a tiny kneeling speck amid infinite emptiness. He thought of the man, Ibn Mulai.

A faint gray filtered into the sky. Morning came in imperceptible gradations. Presently he could see the Targui touching his forehead to the stone in a passion of devotion. Then Feggy became quite plain, still deep in thought. An instant after he saw Gwarli stretched out on the stones, fast asleep. A faint vapor arose from his sleeping body as from a sleeping hound. Then he saw the rain that filled earth and sky with a chill perpendicular shimmer.

With the next increment of light, Million made out the figure of a naked man, some thirty yards distant, sitting motionless on the cliff. The man sat upright, legs under him in Arab fashion, and the veil of rain dimmed his features. It was the man Ibn Mulai. The adept's face was without expression. His eyes were closed. Apparent-

ly he was in some sort of trance. At that moment a peak, far to the East, blazed like a candle with the first touch of sun. The glowing peak seemed to hang in midair above a smoking world. The brilliant point lay straight past the adept and framed the long ascetic head in gold.

Million arose with all thought of his own devotions completely dispersed. He shivered violently and rubbed his sore knees. He felt an impulse to go up and speak to the mokaddam. The long dark face fascinated the American.

By Ibn Mulai's side on the rock was a little earthenware bowl with three or four dates in it. The adept's hands lay prone on his thighs. The American went up and touched the mokaddam's dark naked shoulder almost with a feeling of sacrilege. It was cold and without any feeling of life.

"Ibn Mulai!" said Million in a low tone. He stood looking fixedly at the lifeless face and closed, sunken eyes. A queer sense of necessity came over him. He put both hands on the cold shoulder. "Ibn Mulai!" he repeated earnestly.

A shudder ran through the wet figure, and Million had a queer impression that something had flown back from a distance. The fakir's eyes opened and the balls rolled down and confronted the American.

"What do you wish, my son," he asked.

A queer feeling of childlikeness came over the westerner. He had no clear-cut wish to put into words. Instead his heart was filled with vague and melancholy longings. It was as if the sadness of all human life, which men strive to appease with flesh and food and things, had shown itself naked for an instant, without an object and without end.

"I am very cold, Ibn Mulai," shivered the youth.

"The sun will warm you presently," said the voice.

"And unhappy, Ibn Mulai."

The fakir reached out a dark hand and touched Jimmy. At the touch it seemed that a warmth flowed out of the adept into the American's body. His fatigue and soreness passed away and left in their stead a sense of profound well being. A great happiness, quite without mental cause,

flooded Jimmy's heart. It was as impersonal as sunshine or the laughter of a child. The American stood up and took a deep grateful breath. The feel of the air filling his lungs was delicious.

By now it was full day. A rift had broken in the clouds and behind it lay a depth of African blue. The sunshine spilled through the mountain clefts, and the wet trees glittered.

Goombah Das arose from his long morning prayer. He looked at Million who was coming away from the fakir.

"I see Ibn Mulai has given you a blessing," said the raider in a grave friendly voice.

"I'm completely rested," said Jimmy, and at the moment it seemed so natural he was not astonished by it.

Feggy waked Gwarli. The three men found their horses picking at the grass where they had left them. As Million swung up in the saddle he began thinking over what had occurred to him.

"By the way, Goombah, ought I to have given him something?"

"Of what use would he find your money?" asked the Targui.

"I saw some dates in his bowl," answered the American vaguely.

"A woman brings the mokaddam those dates. For years she has brought two or three dates a day. Once in Algiers a rich Englishman gave the master ten large gold pieces. Thinking to please the old woman the master brought them to the mountain and gave them to her. The next day instead of dates, she brought a platter of cous cous, coffee, a piece of memsib, bread fruit and many other good things. The mokaddam bade her bring back the gold. She did so, and he took both the gold and the food and dropped them over this precipice.

"'I throw my dinner away,' said he, 'because it is forbidden to fatten the body and starve the soul. I throw the gold away because alms are more blessed than gratitude. Bring me my dates. I will never tempt you again.'"

"Did that really happen?" asked Jimmy, amazed at this curious anecdote.

"What difference does it make whether it happened or not—it is true."

"But how can it be tr—" He broke off, drew his bay after the stallion. A little later he began again:

"What I don't understand in the first place—what he gets out of it all—"

"The sky spreads in vain for the mole," quoted the Targui.

"Oh yes, that's all right, but what does he now?"

As the man from Ouarglum made no further reply, the Arkansan fell back on his own thoughts.

Ibn Mulai certainly sat naked among the mountains through heat and chill. He would remain there all through the heat of the coming day. And of what use was it to him? What did it get him?

A thought of Miss Montfairly crossed his mind and he wished the artist could have seen the adept in the rain with the sunlit peak for a corona. Million felt sure it would have made a picture—a wonderful picture. He had a great respect for her work, and an affectionate interest in what she did.

After the rain the air was champagne just off the ice of mountain peaks. Jimmy gulped it, and his thoughts of the mokaddam and his religious impulse vanished.

A convoy of snowy clouds sailed across the sky. Million watched them through the leaves of the great trees under which he rode. The trees were so high that their foliage formed a second stratum of clouds, green, beneath the drifting white. Million could not classify the trees. They bore some sort of white blossom or fruit.

Gwarli still headed the cavalcade down the hinter side of the Atlas range. He twinkled along on stag's legs. Goombah still set the pace on his white stallion. The Targui's light silk clothes had dried very quickly after the rain. He looked as spick and finical as when Million had first seen him sprawling in the Rue de la Kasbah.

The swing of the mare abetted the vagrant mood of Jimmy's thoughts. He wished he had asked Ibn Mulai how this adventure would terminate. He felt sure the adept would have known. Then dozens of questions poured into his mind which he should have asked the mokaddam; for instance, the exact spot where he could find

the parasite of the cotton boll weevil. It seemed to Jimmy the adept could have answered him at once. He meditated on this point for several minutes. Such information would have solved the problem of his whole trip around the world. It would have rehabilitated the cotton industry in Texas—everything solved by a timely question asked an adept on a rainy morning.

Then his thoughts shifted to Judith Montfairly. It worried Million that he was failing to keep a tacit appointment with the artist. Men in the South are taught never to break an engagement with a woman if the skies fall, and never to expect a woman to keep an engagement with them in return. The mentors of this chivalric doctrine are the women.

"She'll think I'm a hell of a fellow," mused Jimmy as ruefully as such a morning would permit, "especially when she went to so much trouble for us. That was damn decent of Judy. She's all right!"

Queerly enough, Million used profanity oftener in his thought than in his speech, which he expurgated.

A sudden wheeling and kicking of his mare snatched Jimmy from his reverie. At a turn in the mountain trail, he had almost ridden upon Gwarli crouching beneath a bush. At the mare's attack, the dwarf whipped to the other side of the bush. The bay stood trembling until Goombah Das and Jimmy dismounted.

"Are you tired?" asked Jimmy in French of the little creature. But a glance at the runner disarmed the fear. The pygmy was scarcely panting. He thrummed something in his banjolike voice, pointed in an easterly direction and made a sharp gesture to listen.

The three men fell silent, sifting the forest sounds. First of all, Jimmy heard the breathing of their horses. He erased this into silence and listened for something else. A morning wind breathed among the tops of the tall unknown trees. A locust trilled and was answered. Somewhere near a humming bird poised with a faint barytone murmur. Then into the stillness slipped a rhythm, a syncopation. It grew into sound, detached itself from the forest pianissimo and defined itself as music.

At the point where Gwarli stopped, the trail followed by the riders debouched into a fair roadway. By way of caution, the three riders screened their horses and waited. The music grew louder, and presently one of the oddest processions came around a curve in the road. In front came an old Arab on a donkey; then came six ebony Africans bearing a veiled litter. Following these came a covey of flexuous women ranging from cream to coffee-color. They wore filmy silk veils, and through these Million could see the glint of golden fillets about their hair and the gleam of bracelets and anklets on arms and legs. They walked, or rather swayed behind the palanquin, making little dance steps to their own singing.

As a rearguard, came a number of tumblers, jugglers and acrobats.

There could be no doubt of their profession. One tall negro deftly kept six silver balls in the air as he marched. Now and then an Arab bounced into the air for a somersault. All of it, apparently, was a mere ebullition of high spirits. They had no audience, so far as they knew, except the trees and Bougainvillea thickets. The capering, singing porcession disappeared as it came, led out of sight by the solemn old Arab, and, after an interval, out of hearing. The three men looked at each other.

"Don't all speak at once," said Jimmy.

"A vaudeville, sir," opined Feggy.

The American glanced at the dwarf and immediately scolded: "Gwarli, drop that bug! Turn it loose, sir!"

The Targui sat frowning behind his mask. "We ought to have stopped that crowd," he guttured.

"Why so? It would be a pity to crab such a merry bunch!"

"It's a wedding procession."

"Then let them be merry now," said Jimmy cynically, forgetting that he was on the brink of matrimony himself.

"They were carrying the bride to the groom's house."

"In that closed litter?"

"Yes. It's the Arab custom."

"Why should we have stopped it?"

"How do you know what woman was in that litter, *m'sieu'*?" asked Goombah.

Million looked at his companion.

"You mean it might have been Aicha—or Zouie?"

The Targui gave a gesture of assent.

"Most likely, *m'sieu'*. We must be near the count's villa. Who is most likely to make so rich a wedding near here?"

"But he already has the girls with him."

"It is a custom to bring in the bride on a litter, if she must be sent out of the house only to return."

A sinking feeling traversed Million. For the first time since he had left the garden, a genuine moving memory of Aicha's beauty revisited him. The possibility that she had passed within thirty yards of him set him trembling.

"Would she be on her way to be married?" he asked in a queer voice.

Goombah got to his feet.

"Why should she be in the litter?" He whistled, and the white stallion stormed out of the bushes toward him. "We can overtake it."

"Yes, but what 'll we do then?" asked Jimmy, running to his bay.

"See who is in the palanquin."

"But those black fellows won't let us look in."

Goombah galloped down the road.

"They will scatter like dust. Come on!"

The bay followed the stallion's lead, and immediately following came Feggy on the black.

"But look here," called Million above the roll of hoofs, "suppose it is some other woman after all."

"We'll ride away."

"And then the woman's reputation will be ruined, Goombah," objected Jimmy, recalling Aicha's fright when he had first seen her. "This is a funny country—if you just look at a decent woman she's disgraced."

The man from Ouarglum looked around. "Do you think I would risk my happiness for a girl's reputation?"

"You wouldn't?" cried Jimmy, shocked.

"No. Why should I?"

"Not for a woman's reputation?"

The tribesman stared around.

"A woman's reputation is no stronger than the guard around her," he burred.

"I don't get you," called Jimmy, peering at the slit in the mask.

"A woman's reputation lies in bars and veils. If they are weak the reputation goes."

"Look here!" cried Jimmy. "You don't think that of all women?"

"I know it of all women. When the jailers turn loose their prisoners at night you can trust your wives at noon."

"You don't put Aicha in such a class?" demanded the Southerner. His tone caused Goombah to glance around again. It is according to the Arkansas code to take violent action if certain attributes of one's sweetheart are even vaguely questioned. Now Jimmy became aware of his Colts beating a tattoo on his ribs.

"*Messieurs! Messieurs!* Why search the palanquin? It can only hold one woman. If you get one it will warn the other. If you get neither it will warn both."

The cockney's objection was timed and valid. The Targui slackened his speed, but stared down the empty road.

"I believe it was Zouie," he muttered. "It must have been Zouie."

Jimmy rode alongside the raider and reopened the point that had set him on fire.

"Now look here, Goombah, do you deliberately mean to say Aicha would be unfaithful to me?"

The raider must have sensed the young man's growing indignation, for he dropped his satirical tone and asked: "Was she not the betrothed of Count Nalaczi?"

"Certainly."

"Did she not see you once and offer to elope?"

"That's different. She's given me her love, do you understand—her heart. Do you imagine any man in the world could step in now—"

A grating laughter suddenly shook the Targui's shoulders and flapped his black muslin mask. In a sudden rage Jimmy was half minded to draw and shoot it out with this traducer of his fiancée's honor, but at that moment the horses swept around a turn in the road. Fifty yards distant a black boy leveled a long stalklike rifle at the cavalcade and yelled something in Arabic which could only mean halt.

The horses began flinging up their heads and slackening.

Jimmy managed his bay, all the time keeping a troubled eye on the stalk of a gun which apparently was aimed straight at his head.

Goombah Das pulled down his stallion first.

"You can't pass!" cried the black with scared eyes.

"Why not?" burred Goombah coolly.

"It is the order of the master."

"Does he block a French road?"

"This is a private road."

"Who is your master?"

"The Count Nalaczi."

"Why can't we pass?"

"The master makes a marriage to-night."

"And blocks the road!" cried Goombah in astonishment. "Blocks the road on his wedding day! When would he throw it open?"

The black boy felt the force of this objection, for he hedged, and finally said respectfully:

"There are some things a servant cannot speak, *sidi*."

"Who is he going to marry?"

"You know I must not call the name of beauty, *sidi*, for fear of the evil eye."

"That is true," agreed the man from Ouarglum. There was a little pause, and he added: "So the Count Nalaczi places a guard to turn away his wedding guests?"

"Are you his guests?"

"Can't you see we are his guests?" Goombah indicated the dwarf with a nod. "He sent his servant to direct us."

The black, who still held the rifle poised, now dropped its butt on the ground. The weapon was half a foot taller than its owner.

"Gwarli!" cried the black. "I hadn't noticed him! *Sidi*, I am a wretched man. You see it was my faithfulness."

"What is your name?"

"Panimorpholos; but you will not remember this against me?"

"No; I desired the name of a discreet servant."

"May you safely cross the edge of the sword, *sidi*."

"But why did my brother, the count, place a guard here at all?" inquired Goombah.

The negro looked up and down the sunlit road at the question, then lowered his tone.

"That is a shameful story, *sidi*. I cannot relate it."

"What is so admirable as discretion," commended the raider.

"Is it possible you do not know?"

"I have just ridden from Ouarglum. I have known the count for many years. We are as brothers born on the same day."

"That is a wonderful horse you ride, *sidi*." Panimorpholos's eyes ran idly over the animal.

"A very good horse."

The black boy twisted.

"You can hear the story from any servant or fellah on the estate except from me, *sidi*, who never chatters. Every one knows it. There is no reason I should not tell it, except I would not repeat such a shameful story."

"Shameful?"

"Yes, shameful!" cried the black. "Disgraceful! I am here guarding this road against a *roumi*!"

"An infidel!"

"Yes, an infidel who may come and steal my master's betrothed."

"Your master's betrothed! Who says anything against my dear friend's betrothed? But what difference does it make what is said? A barking dog does not harm the clouds."

"But it is true!" asseverated the black. "Wali, the bodyservant, overheard a *roumi* speaking to the master at his villa in Al Djezair (Algiers). Another *roumi* had seen her."

"What—saw her?"

"Saw her!"

"And now will my brother still espouse her?"

"Wait! Wait! Wait! That is not all. This *roumi* had written her!"

"No—that is impossible!"

"Yes, it's possible. With a jinni's cunning a second *roumi* disguised himself as a blind and crippled beggar and smuggled himself and his note into the Mustapha

Superieur cemetery while the women were celebrating the Friday before Ramadan."

"What a pit is dug for such an infidel!" groaned Goombah.

"The next day this other *roumi*, this beggar, comes to the master's house."

"For his answer?"

"No; that he received in the cemetery. No, he comes and offers to prove the unfaithfulness of my master's betrothed if the master would give him a certain jewel—a stone—"

At this twist in the conversation a sudden amazement flooded Jimmy Million. He leaned toward the guard.

"What is that? Did Feggy—did that beggar tell Nalaczi—"

"What could you expect from a dog of an infidel, *sidi*? He was kicked out of the villa for his pains. My master loved the girl dearer than life itself."

Jimmy wheeled in his saddle. "Feggy, you damn snake—"

The black horse was browsing ten yards distant. His saddle was empty. The undergrowth around him, as far as Jimmy could peer, was empty. Panimorpholos stared at this queer pantomime. Then the negro observed the empty saddle.

"Where is the other rider?" he asked curiously.

"What other rider?" inquired Goombah, without turning to look at the black horse.

"The little man on the black who came to my master's wedding."

"We were only two," said Goombah, still not glancing around. "I led the black, hoping the dwarf would ride."

Panimorpholos stared, bewildered. "A man's eyes are queer things. I would have sworn—"

"Queer indeed," nodded Goombah, "and may you have life and strength."

"May you have life, health and strength," replied the youth, still staring at the empty saddle.

The two men rode slowly forward. The black horse picked up its head and followed.

Jimmy Million scarcely knew where he went or what he was doing. He followed Goombah. Now and then he glanced back over the empty saddle—but it was impossi-

ble to desert the horses and attempt to trail Feggy through the woods. Why had he ever trusted the groveling little cockney in the first place? It had been against his better judgment. In his thoughts he loaded Feggy's name with every oath the genius of Arkansas had concocted.

When they were fifty yards down the road Panimorpholos came pattering after them, out of breath.

"Sidi," he panted, "I am as dust beneath your horse's hoofs; but why did you ask the name of my master's betrothed when you already knew the name?"

"To see if you were faithful to your master's counsel. A still tongue is better than gold," and he tossed the black a coin.

The guard bowed until his turban almost touched the dust. "May you have life and health and strength."

The Targui rode on; presently he looked around at the empty saddle, lifted his mask slightly, and spat in the dust.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CAMEL YARD.

LOVE is a fever that attacks its victim in waves of ever-growing fury until abated by the cold poultice of matrimony. On the crest of such an emotional billow rode Jimmy Million when he came in sight of Count Nalaczi's plantation. He tingled to plunge at once to the rescue of imperiled beauty.

"We must wait for the Bakwa's return," guttured Goombah Das for the dozenth time.

Both men stood behind palm trunks, studying the vivid green swale beneath them. A dozen thatched roofs spotted the green; they were far enough below to have the velvety texture of toadstools. Nalaczi's plantation was a sort of natural terrace running east and west, and toward the south it was bounded by a void where another declivity stepped down to some unknown depth. Palms and cork trees marked this sheer southern edge against the gray indefinite haze that lay beyond and below.

The road which the Targui and the American had followed and later had de-

serted to climb to this point of vantage wound like a yellow thread in the selva of the terrace. A mountain stream rumbled past the women hunters and lost itself in a tangle of lianas, epiphytes and water growth.

Farther down it reappeared in occasional reflecting streaks, but its course could be more easily traced by the vegetation which formed a vivid green welt across the landscape to where it debouched into the void beyond the plateau.

"Something may have happened to the dwarf," worried Jimmy. "Perhaps he couldn't deliver my note. Maybe he can't get back. Perhaps Panimorpholos grew suspicious and told that we have come. Maybe Feggy—"

"How I ever came to trust such a cur—"

"There are two hundred men down there, *m'sieu*," burred Goombah.

"What do they with so many?"

"Fellahs on the cotton plantation."

Jimmy pulled at the towlike growth on the palm bole and studied the scene below him at the word "cotton."

"I don't see any cotton."

"Yes, you do," grated Goombah Das. "Those big—"

At that moment Gwarli stepped from behind a clump of hazel bushes. Jimmy was on him in a moment, and seized the paper the dwarf held. He snatched it open and began reading hastily. As he read he flung remarks at Goombah.

"We can come during siesta—the two girls will be in the inclosure behind the fondouk—we can get in from the west side—"

Here Jimmy's face whitened; he swore softly under his breath.

"What is the matter?" inquired the desert man.

"They meant to kill themselves if we hadn't come," gasped Jimmy.

Goombah reached up and settled his mask nervously.

After a pause the Targui spoke.

"We must pick out the fondouk from here. We must know where we are going. This stream of water must run through it."

Both men began studying the whelp of green that ran through the knot of houses.

At last Goombah pointed out a bare rectangle beyond a strip of brown thatch. The stream glistened through a corner of it.

"That's our place," he decided. "Now our horses are a little to the left, near the edge of the plateau. We can reach the inclosure from the south—"

"The note says we enter from the west."

"We'll have to see."

He clucked to Gwarli, and the three mis-mated companions struck off down the mountainside, each with his separate gait.

The south wall of Count Nalaczi's plantation was some twenty feet high, and served as a protection against the occasional leopard or lion attacks that still annoy the folk of the desert and the Southern Tell.

The wall had been built before the days of the French occupation to withstand the attacks of Tuareg and Tibbu. During the Conquest it had sheltered the patriot armies of the illustrious Abd el Kader. Now it was peaceful enough with vines, flowers and thallophytes sleeping against it in the noon-tide stillness.

The stream, which Jimmy had seen from above, issued out of the fondouk, or camel yard, in a broad sluice of water. This was guarded against exit or entrance by iron bars set in the stream. The giant, the American, and the dwarf, crossed the creek and moved along the wall, stirring up the warm musky odor of wild cucumber that grew under their feet.

After some twenty-five paces the wall turned at right angles, then continued west again. From the point of inset it was capped with a roof of thatch, which evidently formed stables inside. The reason this particular section of wall had been converted into a stable was because it was penetrated by old portholes, and so formed little slits of windows, which ventilated and afforded a little light to the animals inside.

As the adventurers passed one of these apertures Jimmy heard a queer snarling note within, but the interior was too dark for observation.

A little distance up the stable wall was a barred postern, and to this the dwarf hurried. The gate was quite blank except

for broad iron hinges that extended clear across the shutter, and the big heads of hand-wrought nails. Jimmy tested the shutter noiselessly with his shoulder. It was firmly barred.

Gwarli, however, reached in his trousers pocket and drew out a snarl of horse hairs. He made a delicate noose and slipped it in through a minute crack in the shutter. He fished with his noose in evident delight, and after lifting very gently once or twice the hair caught something.

The little monster's flute-player's smile widened. He pulled the hair very gently. The door swung open with a slight creaking. The men stepped through. Just inside lay a negro sound asleep in the noon-tide. Resting laxly across his breast was a queer old cap-and-ball pistol of the single-shot variety. Three green flies buzzed about his mouth. As Jimmy looked the pendulous lips flopped from side to side and the insects buzzed up. The three men passed on.

A narrow passage between the stables and an interior wall led the way back to the camel yard. A smell of caged animals, quite distinct from that of horses, penetrated this runway. Halfway down Jimmy saw the side of the stable was faced with iron bars.

As the American passed this point a movement inside startled him. He looked around and was surprised to see two hunting cheetahs. The long, narrow animals paced their cage up and down, giving that peculiar final swing to their bodies as they reversed at the end of their beat.

At the end of the passage was a green door fastened by a wooden latch that was worked by a string through a hole. It stood ajar, and through it Jimmy saw the sunlight of the camel yard. He started for it, half running, and in a moment was inside.

At first glance the yard seemed empty and bare, save for the droppings of camels. Then, at the farther end, on a raised stone platform beside the stream, he saw two figures completely shrouded in white melahaf. They sprang up as the men entered. One came running down to Goombah with the peculiar gait of native women who must keep loose sandals on as they run.

The other, a slender white figure, who remained on the platform, grasped Million's entire attention. The whole attitude of the Moorish girl told of a frightened nerving of herself to meet her lover's gaze. Her dark eyes were fixed on Million. With her excited breathing, her filmy veil blew in and out, showing momentary glimpses of an oval face and parted lips.

Now that he was really in her presence, a queer tremulousness seized the American. Such nervous reaction was heightened, no doubt, by his long ride, exposure and lack of sleep. There was a touch of fantasy to his impressions. The girl seemed to glow at him against the ancient walls of the fondouk.

"Aicha?" he almost questioned through dry lips. Then he went forward to her somehow, reaching out his arms.

An exotic fragrance breathed from her melahaf, and her slender fingers crept from its folds into Jimmy's hand. A feeling like some delicious electric vibration tingled up his arm and filled his body. The girl gave a long sigh and leaned into his arms. Million was aware of perfume and a dizzying warmth. The mounds of her bosom were like soft fires. He could sense the very tremors in the turn of her lips pressed to his through the silken film of the haik. For the first time Million realized that never before had the woman in his arms been embraced, or spoken to, or even seen, by any other man.

A tenderness and passion almost bordering tragedy overwhelmed the lover. Tears prickled his lower eyelids. And suddenly it seemed to him that all the passion and æstheticism, the mystery and delirium that make up Africa, were focused and flaming in his arms.

The girl moved her lips a little aside to sigh and whisper the ancient feminine question, if he would always love her thus. It is a question always asked, seldom fulfilled. Upon it hangs the happiness of the woman and of the children she feels beating in her heart.

Million sighed: "Oh, Aicha, forever and ever!"

And that was the peak of his life. A growl from Goombah broke in upon them.

Million whirled. He had forgot that he was not alone in the world with the Moorish girl.

At the door of the camel yard stood the black boy, Panimorpholos, and the enormous Japanese who had kicked the dog over the sea wall. The two stood silently watching the two couples. The shadow of the Japanese lay in a big black circle under his feet.

"*Messieurs* seem very intimate friends with the count's family indeed," observed Panimorpholos.

During the swift interval the two parties had been silently taking each other's measure across the fondouk. Instinctively the two pairs of men choose their opponents. The remark of the black boy broke the truce.

Instantly Jimmy Million dashed across the inclosure at the black guard, and Goombah Das charged the huge Oriental. The eyes of Panimorpholos whitened at Million's rush. He made a motion as if he would run. But it was too late, and he struck out, African fashion, with his open palm.

Million ducked, and the blow plopped on his shoulder. Next instant Jimmy uppercut with his left, putting the whole lift of his body into it. It caught the black boy squarely on the tip of the chin. No doubt it was the first trained fist Panimorpholos ever stopped. He rose in air and made a spread-eagle fall backward.

As he fell Million leaped across his chest in Arkansas fashion. They landed heavily with Jimmy astride his enemy. The black gave a terrible grunt. No sooner were they aground than Jimmy began mauling the wretch's face without meeting opposition.

Every blow cut reddish-brown splotches in the ebony skin. The miserable creature wriggled his head trying to escape the bastinado. He worked his black arms up over his face. Jimmy began pounding his unprotected belly.

Panimorpholos curled up in shrieking agony.

"*M'sieu! Mon Dieu!* Would you kill a man with your hands?"

Jimmy choked him into wheezing silence.

"Not so loud!" he whispered furiously.

Panimorpholos gurgled, walled up his eyes, and wagged his hands in token of surrender.

"Got enough?" snapped the man from Arkansas.

The black lay on his back and stared at Jimmy out of rapidly swelling eyes.

"Got enough? *Mon Dieu!* Do you think I wanted this?"

He put up a hand to his bruised face and began fingering the sticky surfaces where the skin had been peeled.

"Now you stay here," ordered Jimmy, with that masterful feeling that comes with trimming your man. "I'll settle this other."

Jimmy got to his feet and looked at the other. The Targui was in the act of stabbing the Celestial with a kris when the huge man darted in under the blade and made a stroke at the raider's sword arm.

Jimmy's eye could scarcely follow the blur of movement. Came a sharp thud, and the steel spun away, while Goombah's arm dropped as if paralyzed.

The fat man, with a swift and marvelously clever movement of his foot, kicked the kris, a whirling, glittering object, through the sunshine and dropped it into the creek. Next instant the combatants closed.

It was a grotesque struggle. The Targui loomed high above the Japanese. In the very beginning of the struggle their shirts stripped from them like cobwebs. The development of the enormous Targui was remarkable. His tan body was modeled like a prizefighter's. But he had that pitiful Eastern habit of striking with the open palm. His enormous arms drummed a tattoo on the bulk of the yellow man who was simply a smooth tun of flesh. It sounded like the cracks of a bull whip. But the Japanese was under the African's guard, making little dabby motions about the giant's belly. The Targui's face grew distorted with agony. He redoubled his bastinado.

"For God's sake, use your fist!" bawled Jimmy. "Hit him in the head with your fist!"

The American picked out a broad yellow

spot just under the burr of the Jap's ear. He flung his whole hundred and eighty pounds into the blow. Million's fist seemed to sink into a rubbery pad. Next instant a wooden sandal struck Million's thigh, spun him around and round and over. The place where the sandal struck burned like fire.

When Jimmy scrambled on his feet again the enormous yellow man had Goombah on his knees, jabbing the giant under the armpits, in the neck, pinching him here and there. The Targui writhed, struck blindly, and visibly wilted. It was as if some immense yellow spider were numbing its victim.

Jimmy rushed from behind, caught the Jap's hair, and pulled. The yellow head gave back, then came forward with a flip. The ruse caught Million at complete surprise. Before he could get his fingers out of the hair he was jerked over on the enormous sweating back. It was like a wet cushion of jelly.

Next instant a hand grabbed his leg and whirled him under the arm of the Japanese. A swift and terrible pressure clamped the American against the Oriental's baggy side and squeezed the breath out of him.

Another instant, and the whole camel yard wheeled around and round, and Million discovered he had been whirled down between the creature's ponderous legs. Then a pressure that made the world blink and flash before his eyes smashed in his stomach and chest.

Jimmy pushed desperately at the ponderous thighs. His diaphragm made spasmodic efforts to get air. He writhed, tried to get his chest out from between the sweaty thighs. The camel yard went red. Next moment the sunshine flickered like a candle and went out.

Jimmy was aroused by hands shaking him. He opened his eyes and saw a woman of fierce and trenchant beauty staring into his face. She was thrusting a stiletto into his hands with some cry in Arabic. Then she almost lifted him up and faced him toward a shocking spectacle.

In the interval when the Japanese had been manhandling Million, Goombah Das had thrown his stallion's plaited leather

rein over the Oriental's head. Now the thong had disappeared in the baggy throat. Its place was marked by two folds of flesh lying together. The wrestler tried to pull Goombah to him, but the huge Targui danced away, jerking the slender cord through the yellow hand. The noose cut deeper and deeper. This slow strangulation was so horrible a sight that Million forgot the very stiletto in his hands.

The Jap's eyes bulged in their oblique sockets. His face swelled to a purplish mask. The enormous man's swift, delicate movements became groggy. Then suddenly, instead of pursuing his torturer, the Jap surged back against the noose with his whole weight. At the same moment he drew his head down into the mass of his shoulders, tensing his enormous neck. His face went grayish black. His oblique eyes glowed like red coals against this blackness. There came a muffled pop. The noose snapped loose from its victim. Came a startled moment. Jimmy leaped forward with his stiletto; but it was unnecessary. The vast Oriental lurched forward with a jet of blood spurting from his short nose into the dust and dung. He lay motionless, a quivering lump in the hot sunshine.

Goombah grated something in Arabic, waved the fugitives toward the entrance, and ran ahead himself. When the Targui reached the door he discovered that it was barred from the other side and the latch-string withdrawn.

Just then Jimmy became aware of a wide shouting. He could hear hundreds of feet running back and forth. A human storm was brewing about the fondouk. Then he observed that Panimorpholos had slipped out of the camel yard during the fight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABYSS OF SAFETY.

AFTER two or three surges Goombah gave up the door and glanced around the walls of the camel yard. They were sheer and high. Outside the noise increased. A black head popped over the inner wall, peered down on the prisoners, and yelled in Arabic.

The American fumbled for his gun, ready to take a pot shot at the Kybele, when it occurred to him that he would better not add murder to the calendar of his misdeeds in Algeria. So he grabbed up a stone and threw. The missile struck the top of the wall, sent stone splinters over the watcher, who dropped abruptly out of sight.

Like all American youths, Million had played baseball and had pitched. Now he snatched up a handful of stones and kept an eye on the top of the wall. Presently he saw the long stalk of an Arab rifle rise up. He lined out two swift ones at it, and the bearer below stopped climbing. The woman Zouie saw what Jimmy was about, and began gathering projectiles for the human catapult. She brought perhaps two dozen in her skirt. They were all too small. Still it made little difference. Such a defense was momentary, and necessarily futile.

Just then Goombah called to Million in a strained voice. The raider was in the water, one foot up against the obstructing bars, his hands gripped another, and he flung the whole strength of his body against the iron.

The ridges of his back knotted in effort. The American ran to the giant's aid. He put a foot against the bar Goombah held and his hands on Goombah's footbar. The two men formed a cross. The bars must have been deeply rusted, for one snapped. Next moment the Targui jerked out the broken bar for a prize pole and broke out two more.

Jimmy glanced around and saw the rifleman had reappeared on the wall and was leveling on the Targui. The man from Arkansas swung out his thirty-eight and fired on the drop. The rifleman's turban leaped off his head, and the man himself bobbed below. As he did so his gun fired and the bullet splashed the water near Million.

Goombah took the woman Zouie in his arms and disappeared with her through the watergap in the wall. Million beckoned Aicha to him. She ran quickly, making a little detour to avoid the bulk of the Jap, who lay in the dust. Jimmy was about to pick the girl up when Goombah reappeared in the aperture. Aicha jumped into his

huge outstretched arms. He stooped and reëntered the watergap. Jimmy followed at his heels. The water was icy.

As soon as the fugitives were out of the fondouk Million heard the door swing open and the rabble rush inside. He guessed that their immunity from attack had depended on the Targui costume which they wore. Many battles have taught the Kybeles of the Tell a large respect for the desert raiders.

The three fugitives pushed through a tangle of watergrowths and rejoined Zouie. An uproar, mingled with shouted directions, now filled the camel yard. Several shots whipped the water in the gap. The blacks bombarded the hole through which their prisoners had escaped. From somewhere in the stables came a heavy baying of hounds.

During this interval the fugitives were flying down the wall toward their horses. Jimmy ran ahead to loose the mounts by the time the women got there, when a hundred yards ahead of him he saw a figure in a flying burnoose cut across from the villa, headed in the same direction as he. It looked like Panimorpholos. He fancied the guard, in coming back from his watch, had stumbled upon the hidden horses.

Million set out at full tilt after the black boy, yelling for him to halt. He drew his revolver again and ran yelling, "Stop, or I'll shoot! Stop!"

He did fire. At the report Panimorpholos snapped behind a clump of esparto grass and waved his turban from his covert. Jimmy slackened his speed, but kept the turban covered. The American was wobbly from this eternal fighting, running, riding—yes, loving, too, for that had taken its meed of energy.

He trotted up to the clump on legs of lead, all the time warning Panimorpholos not to move. As he came up he decided to force the black boy to help with the horses. When he reached the spot nobody was there. The turban hung on a stem of the feathery grass. At some distance in the coppice he heard a snorting and a trampling of hoofs.

With a sudden spasm of energy Million sprinted forward, bellowing every oath he

could lay tongue to. Immediately he heard the crash of undergrowth and the thrum of running horses.

The uproar dwindled swiftly. Desperation seized Million. At that moment, through a gap in the covert, he glimpsed the black boy flash past, bareheaded, beating the horses. The American poked a shaky revolver and fired again. A distant laugh answered him.

The man from Lonoke turned around with a ghastly face. He found his companions struggling after him through the undergrowth.

"The horses are gone!" he yelled desperately.

Goombah stopped in the act of holding aside some aloe spikes for the women to pass.

"Gone?"

"Driven off!"

"Who found them?"

"Oh, that hell hound, Panimorpholos!"

The half-naked giant looked about the covert. Million stood with threads of smoke twisting out of his revolver.

"Did they get the stallion, too?"

"Not a thing left!"

"That's queer. I didn't hitch Selim—I never do." He stood, evidently trying to make some new plans for this dilemma. The baying of hounds broke out in the distance.

The raider listened and seemed to make a note of this in his calculations. Presently he turned and spoke. "If you women desire to live you will find life in the count's villa."

The woman Zouie made a passionate negative gesture and took a step toward her husband. As she did so an aloe spike snatched the white haik from her head. For a moment she was bare before the men. Her hair had been shaved to the scalp. Its bluish pattern covered her skull like a grotesque tattoo. Her face was pale as marble and regular as a cameo. But with her hair gone she looked maimed. Her head seemed too small. Somehow the very animal perfection of her face made her disfigurement more shocking.

For a moment the woman stared at the swift repugnance in the faces of the men.

Then she saw her haik on a thorn, and reached up a hand to her head. With a cry she snatched the gauze from the thorn, pulled it over her dishonor, turned, and fled toward the distant hounds.

Goombah strode after her the next moment. Jimmy and Aicha followed. The Targui caught the woman by the arm and swung her into a southwest course. This was a long angle back to the stream which they had deserted and to the edge of the great plateau.

"We must get to the watercourse," burred the Targui. "There will be a battue for us. We must dodge the dogs." The two couples plunged on side by side through the bushes.

The fugitives were hot and breathless when they reached the stream again. The pursuing uproar had increased. Jimmy reached a point of vantage and peered down the creek at the chase. He saw an old Arab teasing a pack of hounds with some rags of Goombah's shirt, which he had lost in the fight. He flapped their noses with it while they vented the long, desolate howls of man hunters.

The mere sight of the bloodhounds sent dismay through Jimmy. He had helped trail many a black chicken or corn thief in Arkansas with such animals. A little later the dogmaster put his pack across the stream, and they vanished from sight with noses to the ground.

Following them came a rabble of Kybeles, Koulougous, half dozen or so of the gaily appareled jugglers and acrobats, some young boys, brown and black—all yelling at this human chase. A bunch of this crowd stood uncertain how to cross the icy stream, when they scattered before something.

Million waited another second to see what this could be, when the enormous bulk of the Japanese wrestler splashed through the creek, drawing two thongs after him. At the end of the thongs were two muzzled cheetahs. These cleared the water with easy, catlike bounds and followed the hounds with nervous flicking tails.

Filled with dismay, Million turned and ran down the creek after the Targui and the women. The mountain stream came

up about his waist and froze out what courage he had left. Goombah again led the way, chopping through overhanging vines and masses of algae in the water. Here and there they could walk upright, but oftener they were forced to stoop and go half bent in a tunnel of growth that met above their heads. Fortunately the current, which grew more rapid all the time, aided their flight.

Once Aicha gave a little cry. A diapered water snake had dropped from a limb on her arm, but just as Million lurched forward to unwrap it a flick of Goombah's kris snipped off its head. Evidently at some period in the camel yard the raider had found time to fish his knife out of the water.

By this time the course of the battue was plainly discernible. The dogs were coming back from the place where the horses had been hitched. But when they struck the water there, came the long, wailing cries of hounds at fault.

The whole party hurried in their efforts downstream. Jimmy speculated on how long before the hounds would strike scent again. Even with the thought a mouth belled out much closer to them. Some dog on land had whiffed the fugitives, perhaps where a hand or head had touched a bush. At the signal the whole pack came at full cry, coursing both sides of the jungle.

Aicha's face was as white as her torn haik. Her lips were purplish from cold, and her eyes full of terror. Now and then she tried to push down the skirts of her melahaf in the water.

Jimmy overtook her and tried to aid her in wading over the uncertain bottom. Once she looked at him, and Million realized, with a sort of shock, that they were complete strangers. That physical and neural excitement called love had been frozen in abeyance, and the whole affair assumed that nightmarish quality which belongs to all unaccustomed and hazardous experiences.

He kept looking at this strange girl, and her foreignness helped accent this impression. Her face, with its straight nose and full lips, did not have even the familiar racial ensemble that would have made him

feel at home with any American, English, or even Dutch girl. He could interpret nothing about her face except that she was more than weary and half frozen.

The American helped her along as best he could. The howl of a hound not forty feet behind spurred their flagging efforts. The girl stumbled. Million grabbed a vine to support them both, but Goombah Das dropped back from the front, picked her up in his arms, and strode ahead with her. Million saw her drop her head on his shoulder and close her eyes.

The woman Zouie automatically dropped back to Million. She went along, stooping under the matted overgrowth, with her head turned away from the American. Once Jimmy attempted to assist her in a difficult place. She wriggled her arm out of his hand; she seemed self-sufficient.

For some time, and indeed quite insensibly, the noise of the hounds and battue had been giving way to a monotone ahead of the fugitives. Now, when Million became aware of this sound, it filled the jungle like an organ chord. It grew steadily louder, and presently the shouting of the hunters and the howling of the dogs were all but overpowered.

A little later the Targui stopped in mid-stream. Here both banks were so choked that it was impossible to climb out or in on either side. Immediately in front of the refugees a heavy mist filled the jungle, and in this mist rose a crush of plant life like a green column—airplants, lianas, epiphytes, what not, a chlorophyllaceous crush that piled up and up, sucking in the life-giving vapors. He could nowhere see the summit of this verdant upboiling of life.

When Jimmy tried to stop against the current he found it difficult. The chill water boiled up around his waist and dragged him along. Involuntarily he clung to the Targui woman, and the two stood. Ahead of them Goombah drew his big knife and began hacking a passage straight to the brink of the falls.

What the raider meant to do Million could only guess. Perhaps he meant to hide, or to climb up the vines, or to bury themselves in the water on the brink—everything was equally improbable.

In order to chop, Goombah was forced to put down Aicha. The girl lost her footing instantly and was forced to cling to Million and Zouie and the vines. The Targui woman, however, appeared quite as strong as the American. Her wet melahaf defined a mature and voluptuous perfection.

Such opulence of mold was in keeping with the severe beauty of her face. She made Jimmy think of the "Venus de Milo" in the Louvre. The thought of her disfigured head annoyed Million. If she had had an arm gone, like the statue, it would have been less repugnant, he fancied.

The trio kept creeping down after Goombah. Presently Zouie, with her arm about Aicha's waist, supported most of the girl's weight. They kept edging along, for some incomprehensible purpose, until the edge of the falls lay behind a thin veil of vines. Beyond boiled up the mist. A faint new note attracted Million's ear. He peered around to see a hound lunging furiously against their covert not ten feet distant. He could see its mouth trumpet and its throat swell with its frantic howling.

Next instant a pressure of Zouie's hand and a shriek caused Jimmy to whirl. Aicha was being washed through the vines toward the smooth glasslike turn of the falls. Jimmy lunged after her, but the Targui woman happened to move in his way and stopped him dead.

For a moment Jimmy saw the girl's terrified face, then Goombah Das swung down at full length. He caught her mop of hair, stopped her for a moment on the brink; then, by her hair and her two hands, he lifted her out and pushed her up a thick vine as if she had been a child. She clung where he placed her, with her hair and robe raining a shower over the raider's huge torso.

Then Goombah beckoned to Million. Jimmy loosed his hold and caught the vine as he dashed past. The Targui helped him out and shoved him up the vine after the girl. Then the raider motioned to his disfigured wife. Zouie stared at him and shook her head. Her face was as white as the mist. Goombah beckoned again. She loosed her hold and drifted past.

She made no effort to catch the anchorage, but would have gone straight over the abyss had not the man from the Ouar-glum lifted her cleanly from the stream and shoved her up after Million.

At the edge of the vine thicket the bloodhound was frantic at this rapid movement. It was joined by two more, and their hullabaloo reached Jimmy's ears.

What the Targui meant to do or could do in such a position it was impossible to guess. The mist that arose from the falls swayed like a great white pillar with the wind, or broke and vanished for a moment only to lift its wet breath again. During these lucid intervals Jimmy saw the liana up which they had taken refuge reached out and over the falls to a dizzy height to its anchorage in the crest of a leaning cork tree.

Indeed, the great brown cable of a vine arose to such a height that it looked like a mere thread that sprayed into a hundred gossamer attachments to the cork. It was impossible to climb it. Gwarli would have failed.

Then, straight out from the brink of the plateau, at much the same height, stood the crests of some pinsapos and another sort of unknown tree rising from the depths below. The nearest was about a hundred feet distant, and its whitish green foliage stirred continually in the gusts of air whipped down by the plunging water.

The men and women were skillfully placed, for Aicha was soon unable to support herself, and slid down on Million's shoulders. Her hair fell about his head and shoulders with its alien perfume, and her body had that gentle warmth which a chilly *milieu* seems never to affect in a woman. Her weight was not distressing, for the American wrapped his left leg around the vine and knotted its foot under his right knee, sailor fashion. With this purchase he kept his place without effort; however, his left leg soon became numb.

The only end Jimmy saw to this curious retreat was that the battue should come up and eventually find them. Or if they did not find them, he did not see how they would ever get back up the swift current or ashore.

The three dogs were joined by a fourth, all shoving furiously against the matted vines, their bloodshot eyes fixed on their prey.

Jimmy peered anxiously for the hunters. He tried to listen for the shouts of the beaters, but they were quite lost in the roar of the water.

Then suddenly Aicha gripped the American's shoulder.

"*M'sieu!*" she gasped. "Oh, Allah! Look!"

The American followed her gaze and saw a bright patch of color on the body of a leaning tree. That was all he saw, and he was about to lift his eyes questioningly to Aicha again when he saw the glowing spots of black and yellow had the form of a cheetah.

The American stared. It crept up with such crouched stealth that it appeared not to move at all. Its round, greenish eyes were fixed on the girl.

Million looked at the sinister beauty of the hunting panther and decided that here should go his last shots. He began maneuvering to get his pistol, when he felt a heavy thumping on the liana below him. He wondered if he fired and wounded the panther would it spring? If so it would strike Aicha. A thought came to him to take Aicha's place. He wondered if Zouie could hold the girl up?

He glanced down with an idea of making the shift, when he saw something that flushed every other thought out of his brain. The Targui was chopping the vine in two with his knife. He hacked furiously. For a moment Million stopped breathing, then cried: "Goombah! Goombah! For God's sake!"

At his movement the panther made a quick run up the leaning bole. At the same instant there came a tearing and crackling as the vines gave way. The liana was falling, down, down and out over the precipice. Horror washed through Million. He went giddy. The precipice swung away from him.

The panther launched, but its flying form fell short of the moving vine. It sailed past them, spread out, like an enormous cat, a glory of black and yellow, and in a

long parabola disappeared in the mist below.

Aicha was choking Million. She had slipped down somehow into his arms, clutching her face to his, mingling her terror with his.

With deliberation the great length of the liana swung farther and farther out. Jimmy realized they were not falling—they were swinging. He looked up. Far above the tendrils that moored the mighty vine popped and snapped. Million expected its anchorage to give way. Then he saw the great pendulum would bump into the whitish-green tree.

Instinctively he twisted to grab the scoring branches. Every person on the vine shifted for the catch. Next instant the liana smashed into the foliage. Million grabbed blindly with fuzzy leaves and twigs whipping his face and stinging his eyes. His groping arms found a limb as large as the calf of his leg. He kept his grip on the vine and wrapped both arms around the limb.

Below him Goombah was making the same sort of desperate anchorage. Almost at once the backswing of the enormous vine tore at the men. A knifelike pain set up just under Million's floating ribs.

"Aicha! Get across quick!" he gasped. His eyes burned. He clenched them shut, trying not to think of the abyss beneath him.

"Go across! Go across!" he wheezed.

"I—I cannot, *m'sieu'*!" she wailed, clinging to him.

Million could say nothing more. He knew if Goombah Das loosed his hold to help the girl the weight of the vine would tear him out instantly. He clenched, gripped with shut eyes. He could feel his arms inching loose. Suddenly Aicha lightened.

Jimmy strained up his neck at the miracle. Zouie had crossed to the tree, climbed up above them, and was hauling up the Moors by the hair of her head. The girl darted across in a spasm of terror. Just then he heard Goombah below him gasp: "When I count three—one—two—three—"

Million dropped away his legs and hung

almost lifeless. The Targui woman crept down to him, reached out, caught his dangling legs, and pulled them into the tree. Cold sweat covered the American under his wet clothes; his body ached about the floating ribs.

Above him he saw Aicha glued to a limb, her face an exquisite study in terror through her black disheveled hair. Immediately at him was Zouie; her haik was gone again, and her pitiful bluish disfigurement damned her voluptuous perfection.

Jimmy's weakness and gratitude brought an almost maudlin compassion for the woman. Tears came to his eyes. He was twitching in every muscle.

"H-help me to a limb!" he gasped.

The woman reached up her white, rounded arms. The hands that caught him were shapely. As she helped him down to a horizontal branch the warmth of her body sent a delicious comfort through his whole being. He reached his resting place, sat inert, and the woman held him in place. Through the foliage and the mist the entomologist saw the great liana vibrate once or twice and then hang midway over the falls.

As he looked with weary eyes a crowd of men pushed their way through the jungle to a little open space on the plateau just to one side of the leaping water. They were a rabble of blacks with here and there the bright motley of an acrobat or a juggler. They gave way to make room for two figures.

One was of enormous girth, and he still held one of the hooded cheetahs in leash. The other was the trim and carefully-attired figure of Count Nalaczi. This was the end of his wedding party.

The torn branches and vines over the falls told an eloquent and tragic falsehood to the battue. The riflemen peered down the smooth, glittering debouch where the stream made its leap into space. They lingered, peering and craning down, loath to leave the scene of a tragedy.

At last the count made a weary gesture, and the herd of fellahs fell back, struggling through the coppice.

For long minutes the count and the wrestler stood side by side, looking into

the roaring void. Neither moved. The cheetah at last crouched down at the end of the leash, put its muzzle between its paws and slept.

After a long while the wrestler took his master's arm, and the two moved away through the jungle, the cheetah yawning

and treading delicately after them. Mil-lion watched them disappear hazily. The warmth of the Targui woman filled him with a vast comfort. His eyes dropped shut from weariness, strain, chill, and long lack of rest, and he fell fast asleep in her arms.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



She Drove Him to It

by

Howard Rockey

"WHO'S the chap that looks like a composite of Lloyd George and Beau Brummel?" Robert Hardinge looked across the luxurious studio apartment at a tall, slender, æsthetic man in a faultlessly tailored frock coat.

"Oh, that's Hubert Raleigh, the playwright," answered Charlie Clarke, pausing in the act of shaking up a cocktail. "He's very much of a social lion, something of a nut, and really quite some pumpkins. He had four shows on Broadway at one time last season, and is said to have drawn down all sorts of coin in royalties. He rides around in a limousine that resembles the Queen of Sheba's boudoir, and I understand his study looks like the den of an Eastern potentate. Temperamental duck, but not a bad sort at all, and he has real ability."

"He certainly seems popular with the women," Hardinge remarked, observing the group of stunningly gowned femininity gathered admiringly about the author. "If

he'd have his hair cut and take that monocle out of his eye, he'd look almost like a human being."

Clarke laughed. "I suppose it's part of the game, but I must confess, myself, that I never could understand why a genius has to make eccentricities a sort of trademark by which his superiority over common mortals is to be recognized."

"Are you two making fun of my lion?" asked Elsie Clarke, joining them, pretty and dainty as the charming silver points and portraits she created. "Because, if you are, I shall be angry with you. He's really very wonderful, and interesting to talk to, and he's a he-man, too, decorated with half the orders Europe has to bestow for gallantry in action."

"Well, he certainly deserves a medal for gallantry in a drawing room," chuckled her husband. "Just look at the expression of adoration on the face of Babs Hardinge."

"Don't be silly, Charlie," protested his wife. "Of course Babs is interested in

him, and better still, he is very much interested in her. He's talking about giving her the leading rôle in his new play."

"He's what?" exploded Richard Hardinge. "Is the man crazy, or is Babs—or are you?"

"None of us are," Elsie told him. "You know Babs has talent, and has always longed to express it."

"I know she's frightfully stage struck and always has been," Hardinge responded. "But aside from being beautiful, I'm afraid Babs hasn't a single requisite for becoming a great actress—or even a mediocre one."

"Evidently Mr. Raleigh doesn't agree with you," Elsie smiled. "He just said that Babs was exactly the type he was seeking for the rôle of *Muriel Mathers* in his latest work 'Fetters of Fashion'. I thought so myself, when he read me the manuscript, and that was why I invited Babs here this afternoon to meet him."

Elsie was always doing that. She was forever planning things for other people, and eternally forgetting to do things for herself. She delighted in exploiting the supposed talents of her friends and totally forgot, or else did not know how, to make the most of her own very real ability.

"Why, Elsie!" exclaimed Hardinge, "you're not serious—surely—in thinking that Babs would go on the stage—or that I'd ever consent to it, if she were so foolish as to consider the thing earnestly."

"Why not?" asked Elsie. "You and Charlie are both charter members of the Husbands' Protective League. You don't think your wives ought to do a single thing but sit home and wait for you to get through playing bridge at the club, or chasing about the golf links. I grew tired of it and insisted upon opening this studio and painting people and selling my pictures—and I told Charlie I meant to go on with it whether he liked or not. And you don't like it, one little bit, do you?" She turned with a saucy little face, in the direction of her husband.

"Can't say I do," admitted Clarke. "In the first place you're ruining your eyes."

She turned them on him—great brown

eyes that were twinkling with amusement. "And I suppose Robert is thinking that if Babs went on the stage she would lose social caste and ruin her reputation."

"It isn't that," Hardinge said, "it's the fact that she'd make a monkey of herself."

"Or you?" suggested Elsie mischievously. "You're a couple of cross old bears, both of you!"

Hardinge saw his wife and Raleigh adjourn to a window seat piled with silken pillows and sit down together, talking earnestly. He read the light of ambition in his wife's expression, and he was genuinely sorry they had come. Ever since he had first known Babs, she had been mad to go on the stage. She had played in ever so many amateur theatrical affairs, and was eternally reading the most erotic plays. He had been hauled to the theater three and four times a week, in addition to which Babs attended frequent matinées. He had let her have her own way until now, but he felt that if she really meant to do this thing, it was high time for him to interfere.

His hostess turned to greet some newly arrived guests, and Hardinge sauntered somewhat uneasily toward the window seat where his wife was raptly listening to Raleigh.

"I am sure you could do it splendidly, Mrs. Hardinge," he was saying, as Bob came up. "You will be sympathetic with the character. You will be able to impart to it just the touch of reality and naturalness for which I had hoped. So many well known professional folk are just a trifle lacking in the subtleties of social niceties, and this part requires a perfect portrayal of them—"

Babs's cheeks were flushed with excitement as she interrupted him to present her husband, and Hardinge felt himself surprised at the strength of the grip of the playwright's hand. Instinctively, he rather liked the man, but he wished he would stop putting such utterly silly notions into Babs's mind.

"You mustn't let Mr. Raleigh flatter you *too* much," he warned her. "I'm afraid he is merely trying to be polite."

"Indeed I am not!" Raleigh hastily assured him. "I have heard Mrs. Hardinge

recite, and I saw her in Achmed Ben Hassan's tableaux at the Plaza last month. She was glorious as Cleopatra, and she will absolutely personify my *Muriel Mathers*."

"Well, we can talk it over another time," stalled Hardinge, feeling distinctly uncomfortable under the glance of disdainful reproach which Babs turned upon him.

"There is nothing to talk over, Bob," she said. "Mr. Raleigh and I have discussed it thoroughly, and he is coming to read me the play to-morrow afternoon."

"Yes, indeed," said Raleigh pleasantly. "You see, there is no time to lose. We start rehearsals on Monday, and we hope to have the play on within six weeks. Naturally, with limited experience, Mrs. Hardinge will need a little coaching, so the sooner we begin the better for all of us."

"But Babs!" protested Hardinge.

"But nothing," answered his wife. "I have made up my mind. This is the great opportunity I have longed for, and I think it is wonderful that Mr. Raleigh has such confidence in me. Think of it, Rob—no apprenticeship—no long years of struggle! I'm to step on the stage for the first time as the leading lady in a play by our most successful modern author—"

"Oh, Mrs. Hardinge!" deprecated Raleigh, but he was plainly flattered, and Hardinge saw that the man seemed sincere in his belief that Babs could do what he wished.

He shrugged, seeing that further argument, at the moment, was useless, but he meant to take up the matter with Babs when they were alone. He didn't intend to have her go on the stage in Hubert Raleigh's play, nor in any other. He didn't like the atmosphere of the theater, although about all he knew of it, back stage, was a recollection of his college days, when he had fancied himself smitten with a calcmimed blonde in the chorus of a tanktown musical show. That some actors and actresses are really very charming, cultivated men and women, never had dawned upon him, and he regarded the whole life as artificial and somewhat beyond the pale of activities of women such as Babs.

"Fancy a descendant of the Richmond Vances appearing on the stage!" he reflect-

ed "to say nothing of the wife of a Hardinge!"

He was mighty proud of her lineage, as well as of his own, and his regard for his ancestors was almost barbaric in its intensity. He consoled himself for his comparative poverty with the recollection of the richness and blueness of his blood, and he hated to think of the masks of comedy and tragedy quartering his crest. But he knew Babs's disposition, and he realized all too keenly that he had a difficult task ahead of him if he was to hope to dissuade her from accepting Hubert Raleigh's offer.

But he did not mention the matter again until they reached home that evening, and were seated in the library of their modest, but comfortable suburban home. His wife had been strangely silent on the way out in the train, and he knew that she was pondering over the matter that was perplexing him.

"Babs," he said at last, "I really wish you would put this notion out of your head."

"Well, I sha'n't," she told him decisively. "I've been weighing it from every angle, and I know just what your objections are. Mr. Raleigh has agreed to pay me four hundred dollars a week, and he's going to bring the contract out to-morrow—"

"Four hundred dollars a week!" gasped Hardinge. His monthly salary was only a hundred dollars more, and for months he had earned practically nothing in commissions. He was a clean-cut chap with a pleasing personality, and a circle of acquaintances which, in normal times, enabled him to sell a considerable amount of bonds. Recently, however, his clientele appeared to be utterly without funds, and only the previous week he had heard the firm discussing the advisability of canceling the drawing accounts of all their salesmen.

The suggestion had come as a blow, for only sixty days were to elapse before the third payment on the mortgage of their little home would fall due. How to raise the necessary amount without borrowing it had puzzled him considerably, and his wife was aware of the fact.

"It is a real stroke of good fortune in every way," Babs disarmed him with a smile. "It will afford me the chance I've always wanted, and it will give us money enough to clear the house of our indebtedness and have it all for our own, with no more payments to worry about."

"I'll raise the money some way," he objected. "Don't you worry about that. Besides, I'm not the type of man to let my wife support me. Anyway, it wouldn't do me any particular good at the office to have it known that my wife was on the stage—"

"Being on the stage isn't as though I were in jail—or the divorce court," she reminded him. "There's nothing scandalous about it, and besides, I mean to make good and earn a name for myself."

"After which I suppose I'll be known as Babs Hardinge's husband!" he growled.

But she only threw her shapely arms about him and kissed the frown from his brow. "Now do be sensible about this, and don't make me argue with you any more. I don't want to go against your wishes, but you simply mustn't object, for I'm determined to do it."

That settled it. Babs always did as she pleased, and had done so from childhood. So Hardinge knew there was no use protesting any further. It was going to be a bitter pill, but he would have to swallow it. However, there was just one ray of hope. The play might fail or she might not make good, and then it would soon be over. Of course, such an occurrence would wound Babs's pride, but perhaps, after all, it was better that she should go ahead and get the whole idea out of her head.

The next day, Raleigh came out on the two o'clock train with the manuscript under his arm. He read it to her from cover to cover, and Babs was fascinated. She began to see herself as *Muriel*, and as soon as the playwright had gone, she took up her post before the mirror and began reading her lines aloud. It was a peculiar sort of play, not altogether unpleasant, yet by no means risqué. The character was not a lovely one, but Babs told herself, there were women just like that in the world—vain, mad about clothes, improvident and inconsiderate of others. The fate that be-

fell *Muriel* in the last act, would prove an object lesson to society, and she gloried in the opportunity of giving them its great truth.

Her elation nearly amounted to egotism, and her husband perceived this as soon as he came home. But his eyes opened wider as she showed him the contract Raleigh had brought with him, and which she was to go in town to sign in David Klauberg's office the following morning. There was the salary in plain figures—four hundred dollars a week. It seemed like a dream. Of course, whatever Babs earned would be velvet, so in less than two months they would have more than enough to pay off the mortgage that had been worrying them, with a tidy sum left over.

"I suppose I have no right to howl," he said resignedly. "You'll be able to buy yourself all sorts of things that I can't afford to give you, and I can see that it wouldn't be fair to deny them to you."

"Of course the money will be nice," Babs said with a sigh, "but that isn't the part I'm thinking about. It's the chance to do something worth while—to act—to sway audiences and give vent to the latent talent that's in me."

"Humph!" grunted Hardinge, then his expression changed from one of acquiescence to one of doubt. "Is this show going to stay in New York, or travel on the road?" he asked.

"It will open in Atlantic City," Babs said, "and then come to New York. If the public likes it, I suppose it will stay on Broadway for a whole season—maybe two. Eventually, I imagine it will go on the road. By that time, however, I'll have made my reputation and they'll probably cast me in a new rôle and let some one else play *Muriel* on tour."

That set Hardinge thinking. It would be bad enough to have his wife on the stage right in New York, where he could call at the theater and take her home each evening after the performance, but to have her go on the road would be unendurable. It was not merely his own lonesomeness in her absence that he pictured, but the thought of her being alone in strange cities and unfamiliar hotels and restaurants which

haunted him. The prospect was decidedly unpleasant, and he gave a great deal of thought to it during the next few days.

Rehearsals had begun, and Babs had fallen into the habit of going into town with him in the mornings. Then he would call at the stage door after the stock exchange had closed. At first, the experience rather thrilled him and took him back to his callow days when he had thought it the smart thing to wait in the narrow alley outside some theater. In a way, it added a touch of romance to married life, and it almost seemed to him that he was courting Babs all over again.

He had wanted to be present at one of the rehearsals, secretly eager to see what talent Babs really had, and how she was getting on, but both Raleigh and Babs put their foot upon his desire. Raleigh said that he could not permit outsiders to be present, and in any event, the fact that Hardinge was looking on would tend to make Babs nervous. Babs herself put her refusal on another basis. She said she did not wish him to see her as *Muriel* until the opening night, with the lights and the scenery and her gorgeous costumes—which latter were making heavy inroads on the tiny Hardinge bank balance. However, there was the four hundred dollar a week salary coming after the opening of the show, and Babs said they could soon pay back all that she was drawing on now.

Elsie Clarke occasionally called at the theater and went to luncheon with Raleigh and Babs. On other days, Babs would slip out to some nearby restaurant with Raleigh, or with Crawford Holbrooke, the leading man of the play. Robert was never included in these midday parties, although he was sometimes permitted to join them at tea at the Claridge or the Ritz after the close of the day's rehearsing. He felt like a fish out of water. He rather liked Raleigh, but he formed a distinct dislike for handsome Crawford Holbrooke, with his easy manner, his splendid physique and his distinguished gray hair.

Hardinge was all the more disgruntled because Babs seemed to like Holbrooke very much, and once or twice he clenched his fists beneath the tablecloth when he

heard Babs and the actor discussing some love scene. He did not like the idea of any man holding his wife in his arms, even in make-believe, nor did he understand that Holbrooke regarded such caresses simply as part of the day's work. In fact, Holbrooke had little or no personal interest in Babs. He endured her presence in the company because he liked the idea of having an unknown actress play opposite him, thus adding greater luster to his own name, and in the public esteem making him the star. Besides, Holbrooke's popularity was beginning to wane, and he was more than glad to have a part in a Raleigh play under David Klauberg's management.

But one evening, as they made their way out to their country home, Hardinge was particularly morose. Babs was not fully conscious of it until they sat down to dinner, and then, observing his mood with some alarm, she inquired what was the matter.

Hardinge seemed reticent at first, but she pressed him for an answer and he finally blurted it out. "I was fired this afternoon," he said. "I haven't sold ten thousand dollars' worth of bonds in four months, and the firm had to cut down expenses. I don't know when they'll take me back and I don't know where to turn to get another job."

"I'm sorry," said Babs gently. "It's too bad, after the way you've worked for them, but fortunately we don't have to worry. Two weeks more and the show will be on and I'll be drawing a salary big enough for us both."

Hardinge flushed. "I knew you'd say that, and that was the reason I hated to tell you what's happened. I can land somewhere, of course, and you know I can't sit around and let you support me. The Hardinges are not that sort!"

"Now don't be so uppish!" admonished Babs. "Didn't I marry you for better or worse? If we hadn't a cent I'd pin my faith in you, but as it is, it's foolish not to be glad that I will soon be earning some money."

"It makes me feel like a fool!" he said bitterly. "Folks won't understand and a lot of gossip people will say that I delib-

erately chucked my job in order to let you pay the bills while I loaf around and do nothing."

"How perfectly foolish!" said Babs, and then she seemed suddenly possessed of a brilliant idea. "How would you like to join the company?" she asked.

"Do what?" asked Hardinge in amazement. "I'd make a wonderful actor—like fun!"

"I don't see why not," his wife told him indulgently. "Of course, dear, I realize that you have no inborn talent—that you would never be able to handle a really big rôle—like Mr. Holbrooke—"

"Damn Holbrooke!" Hardinge swore. "You can bet that I'm no *matinée* idol or poseur like—"

"Now that isn't fair!" objected Babs. "Mr. Holbrooke has been perfectly splendid to me. He has borne with my mistakes and helped me—"

"And held you in his arms and kissed you—"

"Bob Hardinge, you're too absurd for words. You know it doesn't mean a thing to him—or to me!" she protested, a little hurt.

"I really didn't mean that," he admitted, apologetically. "I guess I'm just a bit nervous and upset; and I know, Babs, that you—"

"Now listen to me," she broke in. "I meant just what I said. Percy Graham, who plays the part of the butler in the third act, broke his leg last night, and has to go to the hospital. It isn't much of a part, and they haven't picked any one for it yet. I'll call up Mr. Raleigh after dinner and see if he won't let you have it—"

"But I can't act!" objected Hardinge. "I'd be an unholy joke."

"You wouldn't," she insisted. "You know what a well trained servant ought to do, and surely you have brains enough to do it. That's all there is to the thing. Just be natural—"

"I like your nerve!" he said, laughing.

"You know what I mean." Babs joined in the merriment. "The salary is seventy-five dollars a week—"

"You mean that a stage butler gets that much money?" gasped Hardinge.

Babs nodded, as though it were a mere nothing. Hardinge realized that her ideas had changed so far as finances were concerned, and he wondered just how soon she would conceive the idea of giving up the little house and taking an apartment in town. He hoped that time would never come, for he loved the house he had struggled to buy, and it meant home to him.

Nor did he like the idea of being a butler, even on the stage; but seventy-five dollars a week was something to think about, for a man out of a job. Besides, he suddenly recalled, a part in the play would enable him to be constantly near Babs and to look after her if the show went on the road. It seemed to solve the difficulties all around, so he meekly consented to have her call up Raleigh.

The author did not seem to like the plan at first. He was opposed to husbands and wives being in the same company, on the ground that such an association made far more discord than is usual between theatrical folk. But Hardinge was surprised at Babs's attitude. She did not give in, nor did she plead. She demanded that the rôle of *Judson* be given to her husband. She had developed temperament—and she won out. Before she hung up, the place was promised to Hardinge, and it was arranged that he should accompany Babs to the theater the next morning.

"I could conceive of myself as a fairly convincing truck driver, or perhaps a stevedore," Hardinge told her with a smile, "but never in my wildest moments did I ever consider myself as a possible actor. I don't know whether I'll prove a jinx or not, but I'll bet the price of eggs and overripe vegetables will rise the moment I step on the stage."

However, Raleigh took him in hand. He was directing his own play, and much to Hardinge's surprise, the lines came to him easily and the acting was rather fun. He found himself growing interested, and trying to put himself in the butler's place—to do the right and natural thing and to *feel* the tiny part that was intrusted to him. The atmosphere of make-believe was rather fascinating, and he found the work a lot more congenial than selling bonds. Yet,

deep down in his heart, he held himself in contempt, and wished sincerely that Elsie Clarke had never introduced his wife to Hubert Raleigh.

At first he could hardly control his temper when Holbrooke kissed Babs, and he wanted to break the fellow's head when he ill-treated her in the big scene of the third act. But gradually he got used to that, and even rather relished the kiss the author had provided for him during the course of a brief bit he had with Lola Truelle, who played the part of Babs's French maid.

His respect for Raleigh grew, too. Despite his bushy mane and his monocle, the man had brains and ability. The play was good and he was an able director. Hardinge asked him to lend him the complete manuscript, and that night, at home, he read it through several times, until the story and the action were firmly fixed in his mind.

His friends would probably laugh at his being in the company, but now he felt that he wouldn't mind, and he rather enjoyed working this way with Babs, even though she was a star, and he was hardly above the rank of a common super.

Then came the journey to Atlantic City and the final preparations for the opening night. Babs was as nervous as a cat, but Hardinge was calm as a clam. That was probably because it did not matter much what he did or how he did it. His presence on the stage was of so little moment; while Babs felt that the weight of success or failure rested upon her frail shoulders.

Their little store of wealth was nearly exhausted, but relying upon the pay envelopes they would receive at the end of the week, they took a two-room suite at the Marlboro-Blenheim. Babs had felt that she must live in strict accord with her new dignity as a star, and she reveled in the curious gaze of the other guests as she wandered through the foyer of the hotel or sat opposite Robert in the dining room.

At luncheon, when Raleigh and Crawford Holbrooke joined them, she might have been Julia Arthur or Maude Adams, from her poise, and the dignified air of an artiste which she assumed as though to the manner born.

There were many people whom they knew stopping at the resort, and on the boardwalk as well as at the hotel, Babs was the center of interest. She seemed to revel in it. Even those who did not know her personally, were equally agog over her approaching première. David Klauberg, with rare canniness for publicity, had made the most of the fact that two scions of ancient if impoverished families were members of his cast. Babs had been hailed as the famous Southern beauty, Barbara Vance, and he had persuaded her to take her maiden name for the stage. Hence, the première was intended to be somewhat of a social event—as indeed, it proved to be.

The entire house had been sold out for days, and never had Klauberg and Hubert Raleigh faced a more propitious opening. Klauberg, however, was skeptical regarding the untried player. He had argued with Raleigh from the first, claiming that a seasoned actress ought to have the rôle of *Muriel*. He regarded the play as a good property, and he did not like the uncertain possibility of Babs's inexperience ruining it on the first night. Raleigh, however, remained adamant, and Raleigh was now too successful a dramatist to be argued with. What he said went—and without question.

But as the manager looked over the fashionable audience that filed into the theater and listened to the animated conversation of his patrons, he agreed that it had been a wise thing to feature Babs. Even if she did not score histrionically, she might put the show over by sheer force of popularity.

The Clarkes were in the right-hand stage box, and in various parts of the house were scores of folks whose names were well-known to the newspapers and easily to be found in the social register. Society editors as well as dramatic critics were observing the assembly, and there was an air of eager anticipation as the time drew near for the curtain to go up.

As has been the case from time immemorial, the butler held the stage at the opening of the act.

Those in the audience who knew him spied Robert Hardinge, and, amid chuckles over his burnside, burst into applause. Klauberg's brow clouded and he muttered

beneath his breath. Hubert Raleigh, standing beside the manager, in the back of the theater, trembled, and wished for the hundredth time that he had not given Babs's husband a part in the play.

It was a bad start. For a minor character to attract such attention at the opening meant that the crescendo of interest and applause could not possibly be hoped to be sustained. Besides, the audience was taking Robert's presence as a joke, and this was a serious play.

Then Lola Truelle made her entrance. The audience hushed. There was some rather clever, brief dialogue between the two—and then Robert kissed the pretty little thing in her frilly white cap and apron, lifting her dainty high heels from the stage and holding her in his arms quite as though he meant his acted ardor.

That brought another laugh from those who knew the Hardinges, and the representative of *Social Chat* hastily made a pencil note on the edge of her program. This would make a delicious morsel of gossip that could be turned very readily into a neat little chaffing phrase or two in her next column of personal comment.

Then Holbrooke came on in evening clothes, and looking more distinguished than ever. The annoyance which his part called for did not have to be assumed. He had been standing in the wings, waiting for his cue with far more trepidation and anger than either Raleigh or Klauberg felt.

But Holbrooke was still a favorite with those who liked drawing-room acting, and the handclapping which greeted him was vastly different from that which had been accorded Robert Hardinge. Now the maid and the butler withdrew, and Holbrooke made the most of the mastery he held over his audience.

Raleigh took courage, and so did Klauberg, although it was now obvious to the manager that the veteran actor had lost much of his punch, and that his portrayal this evening fell short of past performances. Still Klauberg allowed for first-night nervousness and the annoyance which he realized the leading man must have experienced because of Hardinge.

At last Babs stepped from behind the

scenes and the house went wild. No favorite of the footlights ever received such an ovation. The action of the play was halted, and Babs, lovelier than ever, and with sparkling eyes, bowed her thanks.

Then the audience sat back with a sigh, impatient to see what she could do.

The tenseness of the atmosphere could almost be felt, and Babs, stunned by it, made rather a bad beginning. Yet those in front were indulgent. They were willing to wait until she got into her stride. Crawford Holbrooke was more than considerate—not only because he wished to save the scene for himself, but because he had genuine sympathy for Babs. It had been many years since his first public appearance, but he had a keen recollection of its trials, and he felt a real liking for Babs Hardinge. He wanted to see her score as much for her own sake as for that of himself and the play.

She seemed to take courage, and the act went rather well. Perhaps she was a bit colorless in her portrayal, but then the audience was not sure that the part did not mean her to be so. In any event, the first curtain fell with satisfactory recognition and left those in front of the house in an interested frame of mind. The critics seemed unanimous in their prediction that Raleigh promised to surpass himself in his newest play.

"It's really decently daring," was the way Holland, of the *Chronicle*, expressed himself; and Lamont of the *Times* voted the dialogue unusually scintillating. And one and all agreed that Babs Hardinge was stunning, so far as perfection of face and figure were concerned.

They were even more convinced of this when the curtain rose again and revealed her with Holbrooke in a beautiful setting, representing a luxurious library with heavy hangings and the soft light from a fireplace illumining Babs's charms. In such an atmosphere Holbrooke was at his best, and with old-time skill he carried Babs with him through the scene. The critics were agreeably surprised at her, and the audience was little short of amazed, while Babs herself trod a path of clouds, her befuddled brain in a whirl. Her own voice sounded far away, and only the deep tones of Holbrooke

seemed to bring her back sufficiently to make her remember to speak her lines when he gave her her cues.

It all seemed more than merely artificial to her. It was as though she were living a dream—a visionary existence which threatened to turn into a hideous nightmare every time she looked out into the yawning blackness of the theater, where misty faces peered at her dimly, and eyes seemed to glare at her viciously, like those of a thousand demons. It was stage fright and more. Things had gone well enough at rehearsals, and Babs had even reached great dramatic heights in the privacy of her own boudoir; but now, in the glare of the footlights, and under the stare of the house—her limbs trembled. She mouthed her words so that they could scarcely be heard, and she felt as though she were going to faint.

Even Holbrooke, solicitous as he was, could no longer help her. The big scene fell flat. What should have been a triumph proved to be a farce. It was pathetic. The heart of the audience went out to her in her beautiful misery, for it was all too apparent—but it soon became obvious that Babs lacked the essentials of a great actress. Her husband sensed it, pityingly, for he realized what this experience must be costing her. He tried to encourage her in the brief bits he had with her, but instead of leaning upon his support—when he wished to be her foil—she only glanced at him helplessly as a terrified child might do.

Klauberger was beside himself, and Raleigh was consumed with mortification as he saw his high points slurred over, his situations lost, and his dialogue stammered almost ridiculously. He had sought a type, and he had found it in Babs, but he had not realized that she could not portray her true self upon the stage.

The final curtain fell with a little ripple of good-natured applause from Babs's friends, and the footlights were showered with flowers for her. But deep down in her heart, Babs knew that she had failed, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks as she hurried to her dressing room.

Holbrooke detained her in the wings, however. "Don't take it so to heart," he said consolingly. "A first night is always trying

—even to those of us who have had long experience. A special rehearsal in the morning, to straighten out a few things, and you'll do ever so much better to-morrow night."

Babs appreciated his attitude, but she knew that what he said was not the case. She would never do better; and she wondered whether she would have the courage to step out upon the stage again. It had taken all her self-control to remain there to-night.

She had no heart for the supper party Raleigh was giving after the performance, and she asked Hardinge to seek out the author and say that she was not feeling well.

"Just a little nervous and tired out," Hardinge said, trying to make light of it. "I think she'll be all right after a good night's rest."

"I hope so," rejoined Raleigh politely, just a bit relieved that Babs would not be a guest at the gathering which he himself now dreaded to face. Failure was not a pleasant thought to him, especially when it meant the bungling of a play that would have been a hit if he had taken Klauberger's advice and given Babs's rôle to any one of half a dozen prominent actresses.

The manager was furious. "It's all right to put society women in the movies, where a director can make them do what he wants, and where you can stop the turning of the crank if they go blaa; but on the stage it's sheer idiocy! The show goes to the storehouse the end of the week!"

But none of them were prepared for the criticisms that appeared the next morning. Hardinge was sitting by the little balcony window, overlooking the ocean, when Babs awoke, a sheaf of newspaper scattered about him on the floor. He had read them through, one after the other with ever-increasing amazement, and now a frank exclamation of surprise escaped him. He had just finished Holland's review in the *Chronicle*:

Despite the finished skill of Mr. Holbrooke and the rare charm of Miss Vance, "Fetters of Fashion" failed to register at the opening performance. Perhaps Mr. Holbrooke's charming society maner is a little too familiar

to playgoers to cause any particular thrill. In any event, his performance last evening lacked freshness and interest. Miss Vance, recently recruited to the stage from real drawing-rooms, was as beautiful a picture as could be imagined, but her acting could hardly have been worse. In fact, the entire cast seemed to be nervous and awkward, with one outstanding exception. That was the character of *Judson*, the butler, played with rare skill by Mr. Robert Hardinge, who in private life is Miss Vance's husband. While intrusted with only a bit, Mr. Hardinge got every atom out of it, and played the rôle with such charm and rare humor that it is hoped that he will be seen in a more important part in the near future. "Fetters of Fashion" is probably doomed for a short life, but if it has done nothing more worth while, it has at least served the public in presenting a young actor of real talent and great promise.

"Well, can you beat that?" demanded Hardinge of no one in particular, and Babs sat up in bed, staring at him inquiringly. Hesitatingly, he handed her the newspaper. He could not bring himself to explain. She would have to read the story for herself. It was her theatrical death warrant, and Hardinge felt like an executioner when he served it upon her. He also hated that fool critic for having praised him, thus adding to Babs's anguish.

But strangely enough, it did not affect her as he had imagined it would. The cruel criticism only seemed to spur her ambition to do better—and she took heart as she remembered what Holbrooke had said to her in the wings the previous evening. Instead of being hurt she was delighted at the praise of Robert. "I'm proud of you, Bob," she said. "Wouldn't it have been terrible if they'd said we were *both* failures? Now I'll have to stir myself and catch up to you."

"Go to it, old girl!" he said joyously, but with a heavy heart, for he knew that she was only deluding herself when she hoped to succeed later on. "But I don't take any credit to myself for giving a life-like performance of a servant. It's like telling a man he'd make a good head waiter."

Crawford Holbrooke, however, was furious when his eyes lighted upon the unanimous roasting he received at the hands of all the critics. Some of them had been less kind to him than the *Chronicle* man, and he

flew unto an unreasoning rage. Every paper spoke disparagingly of Babs, and none of them forgot to give a little puff to Hardinge. Klauberg was amused, and Raleigh astounded.

But both the author and the manager were thunderstruck when Holbrooke gave notice that he would leave the production at the end of the week—provided Klauberg persisted in keeping the play on the boards that long. The manager had seriously considered withdrawing it forthwith, but Raleigh objected, and Klauberg did not wish to offend the man from whose work he had made so much money in the past. Raleigh insisted upon continuing for two or three weeks at least, until he could scout about for another cast and doctor the play as he observed its weak spots from the front of the house.

The second performance was, if anything, worse than the first, and the third night found an almost empty house. Then on Thursday came a new complication. A jinx surely seemed to follow the show. While riding on the beach that afternoon Holbrooke had been thrown from the saddle and too severely injured to appear on the stage for several days. That seemed to cap the climax, and Klauberg announced his intention of quitting forthwith.

The news came as a blow to Babs, who was still certain that with a little more practice she would be able to win the critics when they opened in New York. Her lip quivered as she heard the manager's ultimatum, and Hardinge's heart went out to his wife. Of course it was hopeless, but he knew she would never be happy until she had been given her chance on Broadway and had at least demonstrated to herself that histrionic laurels were not for her.

Then he remembered the things the papers had said about him. The notices meant nothing to him, except as a huge joke. He imagined, too, that the critics had praised him with malicious humor, in order to make their slaps at Holbrooke and Babs all the more biting. But now he saw a chance to turn the criticisms to his advantage—and to that of Babs.

"Mr. Klauberg," he said, very seriously. "I seem to have had some little success, and

I believe I can do bigger things than the part for which I was cast. I know this play backward and forward, because I've read it through several times, as well as having rehearsed it. I believe in it implicitly—"

Raleigh puffed up with pride and self-satisfaction. He decided that Hardinge had brains—and potential ability.

"You have made an initial investment in the production," Hardinge went on, knowing that he touched the manager's tender spot. "Mr. Raleigh has put his best into it, and it would be a crime to see the piece taken off the boards before a really worth-while series of audiences has had a chance to judge it. I don't even expect that I can rattle around in Mr. Holbrooke's boots, but I know his lines, and I believe I could play the part fairly acceptably until he is able to resume his rôle."

Klauberger pondered a moment. He had rented the theater for the week. He meant to pay the company a full week's salary, as was his custom, for Klauberger was fair in all he did. He did not stand to lose anything by letting Hardinge do as he asked—and the young man *might* make a go of it, he thought.

"But where the devil will I get a butler that the critics won't roast?" he asked with a twinkle in his eyes. "According to the papers no one in the cast is any good but you. If I promote you, and you're rotten in Holbrooke's part—there's nothing left!" He was sarcastic, yet kindly.

"I'll take care of the butler," Harbrooke assured him. "I'll borrow a real one from Charlie Clarke. He and his wife are down here at the Ambassador, with a suite of their own and a private dining room and all that sort of dog. I'll get him to lend me Terence. He can't act, of course—but he knows his place, and he's a perfect servant."

Klauberger grinned. It was a chance worth taking, and he could be no worse off by consenting than if he refused. "All right," he agreed. "Get your butler and prime yourself in Holbrooke's lines to go on to-night."

Then Klauberger retired to his temporary office and spent half an hour with his press agent. He meant to make the most of the story. The accident and the changes in the cast would permit him to get a good

notice in the papers. The time was short, and they had to work fast, but by the dinner hour the news had spread through the various hotel corridors and practically the entire first-night audience stormed the box office in an effort to secure seats. The numerous friends of Babs and Bob wanted to see whether or not the second attempt could be any worse than the first, and the critics came through curiosity to see what the big idea might be, and whether their prophecies regarding Hardinge would prove to be correct.

They did. He carried the various scenes with feeling and finesse. He looked the part and he lived it—because he believed in the play. Babs was awed by his acting, and she tried to live up to the standard he set, but just as she had done with Holbrooke, she failed miserably.

But that was of no moment to Klauberger and to Raleigh. The house went wild over Hardinge, and the author knew that his play had gone over. Klauberger knew something that pleased him still more. "Fetters of Fashion" was going to prove a gold mine. With Hardinge in the leading rôle it was good for two years on Broadway at least, or else he missed his guess—and Klauberger seldom went wrong in his theatrical judgment.

The comments the next morning were as facetious as they were enthusiastic. The *Chronicle* sounded the keynote of the others, and as the stories were wired to New York, the theater-going public of the metropolis was eager in its anticipation of the Broadway opening. This was the story that did it:

Hubert Raleigh and David Klauberger have evidently invented a new way to make a good play better. The first performance of "Fetters of Fashion" showed an utterly hopeless company—each actor being miscast, with the exception of one. And for that one the reviewers unanimously prophesied a splendid future.

The actor in question is Robert Hardinge—new to the stage, and fresh from the Wall Street sector. He played the part of *Judson*, the butler, on the opening night.

When "Fetters of Fashion" opens at the Polyanna Theater in New York on the twenty-first, Robert Hardinge will appear in the rôle in which Crawford Holbrooke was

seen before his unfortunate accident. Great favorite that Holbrooke has been for many years, young Mr. Hardinge excels him in artistry. Barbara Vance—who is Mr. Hardinge's wife—will withdraw from the cast, and her successor is not as yet announced. However, Broadway awaits the arrival of Mr. Hardinge.

Then the *Times* added a final touch that set those on the inside laughing:

Whether intentional or not, Mr. Klauberg seems intent upon making his apprentice-actors appear in the rôle of butlers. Mr. Terence McTerry, who succeeded Mr. Hardinge in the part of *Judson*, gave the most lifelike portrayal of an autocratic domestic in buckled-shoes and powdered wig, the stage has seen in some time. Undoubtedly he will soar to greater characterizations quite as quickly as did Mr. Hardinge. To keep such a polished actor in so minor a rôle would be little sort of a crime against the art of the theater.

For three hundred and fifty-three nights "Fetters of Fashion" ran at the Polyanna Theater. Klauberg renewed Hardinge's contract on a basis of a thousand a week in salary, plus a percentage of the profits. Babs retired from the glamour of the stage, and wept her eyes out when Hardinge insisted upon getting rid of the little suburban cottage and taking a suite at the Biltmore. It seemed like moving to a strange land to her, and she longed for the peace and quiet that had been theirs in the days when the

theater had only meant to them a couple of orchestra chairs.

But Robert Hardinge had developed personality as well as temperament. He went Hubert Raleigh one better by wearing a rimless monocle, without any cord—and the thing really stuck in his eye. Hardinge had a limousine that rivaled Raleigh's in its upholstered splendor, and he affected Japanese kimonos when lounging in his den.

The critics hailed him as America's foremost young actor, and predicted that he would some day occupy the niche once occupied by the late Richard Mansfield, and now filled by Otis Skinner and George Arliss. Babs was proud of him, and not at all regretful of her own lack of success. Yet she did rather feel that being on the stage was somewhat beneath the dignity of a Hardinge. She also wished that the theater, and countless social engagements, would release her husband to her a little more frequently.

On the whole she was inclined to regret the day that Robert had met Hubert Raleigh in Elsie Clarke's studio; and Elsie Clarke bemoaned the moment when she had loaned Hardinge her perfect man-servant. For Terence McTerry has deserted domestic service for the Keith circuit. He has a fifty-two weeks' contract in a skit of his own, entitled "The Gentleman-Butler."

SLAVES OF THE LAMP

WHEN old Aladdin rubbed his lamp,
The fairy story goes—a flame
Sprang into life, and from its heart
To do his will, a genii came!

A wizard far more wonderful
Is ready at my beck and call—
Wishing his services, I touch
A small, black button—that is all!

And instantly, at dead of night
My darkened room lights brilliantly!
Shucks! old Aladdin's lamp has naught
On electricity and me!

Mazie V. Caruthers.



The Garden of Eden

Part IV

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Trillin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FALSE PROPHET.

"THE evil at heart, when they wish to take, seem to give," said Abraham, mouthing the words with his withered lips, and he came to one of his prophetic pauses.

The master of the Garden permitted it to the privileged old negro, who added now: "Benjamin is evil at heart."

"He did not ask for the horse," said David, who was plainly arguing against his own conviction.

"Yet he knew." The ancient face of Abraham puckered. "Po' white trash!" he muttered. Now and then one of these quaint phrases would break through his acquired diction, and they always bore home to David a sense of that great world beyond the mountains. Matthew had often described that world, but one of Abraham's odd expressions carried him in a breath into cities filled with men.

"His absence is cheaply bought at the price of one mare," continued the negro soothingly.

"One mare of Rustir's blood! What is the sin for which the Lord would punish me with the loss of Shakra? And I miss her

as I would miss a human face. But Benjamin will return with her. He did not ask for the horse."

"He knew you would offer."

"He will not return?"

"Never!"

"Then I shall go to find him."

"It is forbidden."

Abraham sat down, cross-legged, and watched with impish self-content while David strode back and forth in the patio. A far-off neighing brought him to a halt, and he raised his hand for silence. The neighing was repeated, more clearly, and David laughed for joy.

"A horse coming from the pasture to the paddock," said Abraham, shifting uneasily.

The day was old and the patio was filled with a clear, soft light, preceding evening.

"It is Shakra! Shakra, Abraham!"

The negro rose.

"A yearling. It is too high for the voice of a grown mare."

"The distance makes it shrill. Abraham, Abraham, cannot I find her voice among ten all neighing at once?"

"Then beware of Benjamin, for he has returned to take not one but all."

But David smiled at the skinny hand which was raised in warning.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 15.

"Say no more," he said solemnly. "I am already to blame for hearkening to words against my brother Benjamin."

"You yourself had said that he tempted you."

Because David could find no ready retort he grew angry.

"Also, think of this. Your eyes and your ears are grown dull, Abraham, and perhaps your mind is misted also."

He had gone to the entrance into the patio and paused there to wait with a lifted head. Abraham followed and attempted to speak again, but the last cruel speech had crushed him. He went out on the terrace, and looking back saw that David had not a glance for him; so Abraham went feebly on.

"I have become as a false prophet," he murmured, "and I am no more regarded."

His life had long been in its evening, and now, at a step, the darkness of old age fell about him. From the margin of the lake he looked up and saw Connor ride to the patio.

David, at the entrance, clasped the hand of his guest while he was still on the horse and helped him to the ground.

"This," he said solemnly, "is a joyful day in my house."

"What's the big news?" inquired the gambler, and added: "Why so happy?"

"Is it not the day of your return? Isaac! Zacharias!"

They came running as he clapped his hands.

"Set out the oldest wine, and there is a haunch of the deer that was killed at the gate. Go! And now, Benjamin, did Shakra carry you well and swiftly?"

"Better than I was ever carried before."

"Then she deserves well of me. Come hither, Shakra, and stand behind me. Truly, Benjamin, my brother, my thoughts have ridden ten times across the mountains and back, wishing for your return!"

Connor was sufficiently keen to know that a main reason for the warmth of his reception was that he had been doubted while he was away, and while they supped in the patio he was even able to guess who had raised the suspicion against him. Word was brought that Abraham lay in his

bed seriously ill, but David Eden showed no trace of sympathy.

"Which is the greater crime?" he asked Benjamin a little later. "To poison the food a man eats or the thoughts in his mind?"

"Surely," said the crafty gambler, "the mind is of more importance than the stomach."

Luckily David bore the main burden of conversation that evening, for the brain of Connor was surcharged with impatient waiting. His great plan, he shrewdly guessed, would give him everything or else ruin him in the Garden of Eden, and the suspense was like an eating pain. Luckily the crisis came on the very next day.

Jacob galloped into the patio, and flung himself from the back of Abra.

David and Connor rose from their chairs under the arcade where they had been watching Joseph setting great stones in place around the border of the fountain pool. The master of the Garden went forward in some anger at this unceremonious interruption. But Jacob came as one whose news is so important that it overrides all need of conventional approach.

"A woman," he panted. "A woman at the gate of the Garden!"

"Why are you here?" said David sternly.

"A woman—"

"Man, woman, child, or beast, the law is the same. They shall not enter the Garden of Eden. Why are you here?"

"And she rides the gray gelding, the son of Yoruba!"

At that moment the white trembling lips of Connor might have told the master much, but he was too angered to take heed of his guest.

"That which has once left the Garden is no longer part of it. For us, the gray gelding does not exist. Why are you here?"

"Because she would not leave the gate. She says that she will see you."

"She is a fool. And because she was so confident, you were weak enough to believe her?"

"I told her that you would not come; that you could not come!"

"You have told her that it is impossible

for me to speak with her?" said David, while Connor gradually regained control of himself and summoning his strength for the crisis.

"I told her all that, but she said nevertheless she would see you."

"For what reason?"

"Because she has money with which to buy another horse like her gelding, which is old."

"Go back and tell her that there is no money price on the heads of my horses. Go! When Ephraim is at the gate there are no such journeyings to me."

"Ephraim is here," said Jacob stoutly, "and he spoke much with her. Nevertheless she said that you would see her."

"For what reason?"

"She said: 'Because.'"

"Because of what?"

"That word was her only answer: 'Because'."

"This is strange," murmured David, turning to Connor. "Is that one word a reason?"

"Go back again," commanded David grimly. "Go back and tell this woman that I shall not come, and that if she comes again she will be driven away by force. And take heed, Jacob, that you do not come to me again on such an errand. The law is fixed. It is as immovable as the rocks in the mountains. You know all this. Be careful hereafter that you remember. Be gone!"

The ruin of his plan in its very inception threatened Ben Connor. If he could once bring David to see the girl he trusted in her beauty and her cleverness to effect the rest. But how lead him to the gate? Moreover, he was angered and his frown boded no good for Jacob. The old negro was turning away, and the gambler hunted his mind desperately for an expedient. Persuasion would never budge this stubborn fellow so used to command. There remained the opposite of persuasion. He determined on an indirect appeal to the pride of the master.

"You are wise, David," he said solemnly. "You are very wise. These creatures are dangerous, and men of sense shun them. Tell your servants to drive her away with

blows of a stick so that she will never return."

"No, Jacob," said the master, and the negro returned to hear the command. "Not with sticks. But with words, for flesh of women is tender. This is hard counsel, Benjamin!"

He regarded the gambler with great surprise.

"Their flesh may be tender, but their spirits are strong," said Connor. The opening he had made was small. At least he had the interest. Of David, and through that entering wedge he determined to drive with all his might.

"And dangerous," he added gravely.

"Dangerous?" said the master. He raised his head. "Dangerous?"

As if a jackal had dared to howl in the hearing of the lion.

"Ah, David, if you saw her you would understand why I warn you!"

"It would be curious. In what wise does her danger strike?"

"That I cannot say. They have a thousand ways."

The master turned irresolutely toward Jacob.

"You could not send her away with words?"

"David, for one of my words she has ten that flow with pleasant sound like water from a spring, and with little meaning, except that she will not go."

"You are a fool!"

"So I felt when I listened to her."

"There is an old saying, David, my brother," said Connor, "that there is more danger in one pleasant woman than in ten angry men. Drive her from the gate with stones!"

"I fear that you hate women, Benjamin."

"They were the source of evil."

"For which penance was done."

"The penance followed the sin."

"God, who made the mountains, the river and this garden and man, He made woman also. She cannot be all evil. I shall go."

"Then, remember that I have warned you. God, who made man and woman, made fire also."

"And is not fire a blessing?"

He smiled at his triumph and this contest of words.

"You shall go with me, Benjamin."

"I? Never!"

"In what is the danger?"

"If you find none, there is none. For my part I have nothing to do with women."

But David was already whistling to Glani.

"One woman can be no more terrible than one man," he declared to Benjamin. "And I have made Joseph, who is great of body, bend like a blade of grass in the wind."

"Farewell," said Connor, his voice trembling with joy. "Farewell, and God keep you!"

"Farewell, Benjamin, my brother, and have no fear."

Connor followed him with his eyes, half-triumphant, half-fearful. What would happen at the gate? He would have given much to see even from a distance the duel between the master and the woman.

At the gate of the patio David turned and waved his hand.

"I shall conquer!"

And then he was gone.

Connor stared down at the grass with a cynical smile until he felt another gaze upon him, and he became aware of the little beast—eyes of Joseph glittering. The giant had paused in his work with the stones.

"What are you thinking of, Joseph?" asked the gambler.

The negro made an indescribable gesture of hate and fear.

"Of the whip!" he said. "I also opened the gate of the Garden. On whose back will the whip fall this time?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOMECOMING.

NEAR the end of the eucalyptus avenue, and close to the gate, David dismounted and made Jacob do likewise.

"We may come on them by surprise and listen," he said. "A soft step has won great causes."

They went forward cautiously, inter-

changing sharp glances as though they were stalking some dangerous beast, and so they came within earshot of the gate and sheltered from view of it by the edge of the cliff. David paused and cautioned his companion with a mutely raised hand.

"He lived through the winter," Ephraim was saying. "I took him into my room and cherished him by the warmth of my fire and with rubbing, so that when spring came, and gentler weather, he was still alive—a great leggy colt with a backbone that almost lifted through the skin. Only high, bright eyes comforted me and told me that my work was a good work."

David and Jacob interchanged nods of wonder, for Ephraim was telling to this woman the dearest secret of his life.

It was how he had saved the weakling colt, Jumis, and raised him to a beautiful, strong stallion, only to have him die suddenly in the height of his promise. Certainly Ephraim was nearly won over by the woman; it threw David on guard.

"Go back to Abra," he whispered. "Ride on to the gate and tell her boldly to be gone. I shall wait here, and in time of need I shall help you. Make haste. Ephraim grows like wet clay under her fingers. Ah, how wise is Benjamin!"

Jacob obeyed. He stole away and presently shot past at the full gallop of Abra. The stallion came to a sliding halt, and Jacob spoke from his back, which was a grave discourtesy in the Garden of Eden.

"The master will not see you," he said. "The sun is still high. Return by the way you have come; you get no more from the Garden than its water and its air. He does not sell horses."

For the first time she spoke, and at the sound of her voice David Eden stepped out from the rock; he remembered himself in time and shrank back to shelter.

"He sold this horse."

"It was the will of the men before David that these things should be done, but the Lord knows the mind of David and that his heart bleeds for every gelding that leaves the Garden. See what you have done to him! The marks of the whip and the spur are on his sides. Woe to you if David should see them!"

She cried out at that in such a way that David almost felt she had been struck.

"It was the work of a drunken half-breed, and not mine."

"Then God have mercy on that man, for if the master should see him, David would have no mercy. I warn you: David is one with a fierce eye and a strong hand. Be gone before he comes and sees the scars on the gray horse."

"Then he is coming?"

"She is quick," thought David, as an embarrassed pause ensued. "Truly, Benjamin was right, and there is danger in these creatures."

"He has many horses," the girl went on, "and I have only this one. Besides, I would pay well for another."

"What price?"

"He should not have asked," muttered David.

"Everything that I have," she was answering, and the low thrill of her voice went through and through the master of the Garden. "I could buy other horses with this money, but not another like my gray. He is more than a horse. He is a companion to me. He understands me when I talk, and I understand him. You see how he stands with his head down? He is not tired, but hungry. When he neighs in a certain way from the corral I know that he is lonely. You see that he comes to me now? That is because he knows I am talking about him, for we are friends. But he is old and he will die, and what shall I do then? It will be like a death in my house!"

Another pause followed.

"You love the horse," said the voice of Ephraim, and it was plain that Jacob was beyond power of speech.

"And I shall pay for another. Hold out your hand."

"I cannot take it."

Nevertheless, it seemed that he obeyed, for presently the girl continued: "After my father died I sold the house. It was pretty well blanketed with a mortgage, but I cleared out this hundred from the wreck. I went to work and saved what I could. Ten dollars every month, for twenty months—you can count for yourself—makes two

hundred, and here's the two hundred more in your hand. Three hundred altogether. Do you think it's enough?"

"If there were ten times as much," said Jacob, "it would not be enough. There—take your money. It is not enough. There is no money price on the heads of the master's horses."

But a new light had fallen upon David. Women, as he had heard of them, were idle creatures who lived upon that which men gained with sweaty toil, but this girl, it seemed, was something more. She was strong enough to earn her bread, and something more. Money values were not clear to David Eden, but three hundred dollars sounded a very considerable sum. He determined to risk exposure by glancing around the rock. If she could work like a man no doubt she was made like a man and not like those useless and decorative creatures of whom Matthew had often spoken to him, with all their graces and voices.

Cautiously he peered and he saw her standing beside the old, broken gray horse. Even old Ephraim seemed a stalwart figure in comparison.

At first he was bewildered, and then he almost laughed aloud. Was it on account of this that Benjamin had warned him, this fragile girl? He stepped boldly from behind the rock.

"There is no more to say," quoth Jacob.

"But I tell you, he himself will come."

"You are right," said David.

At that her eyes turned on him, and David was stopped in the midst of a stride until she shrank back against the horse.

Then he went on, stepping softly, his hand extended in that sign of peace which is as old as mankind.

"Stay in peace," said David, "and have no fear. It is I, David."

He hardly knew his own voice, it was so gentle. A twilight dimness seemed to have fallen upon Jacob and Ephraim, and he was only aware of the girl. Her fear seemed to be half gone already, and she even came a hopeful step toward him.

"I knew from the first that you would come," she said, "and let me buy one horse—you have so many."

"We will talk of that later."

"David," broke in the grave voice of Ephraim, "remember your own law!"

He looked at the girl instead of the negro as he answered: "Who am I to make laws? God begins where David leaves off."

And he added: "What is your name?"

"Ruth."

"Come, Ruth," said David, "we will go home together."

She advanced as one in doubt until the shadow of the cliff fell over her. Then she looked back from the throat of the gate and saw Ephraim and Jacob facing her as though they understood there was no purpose in guarding against what might approach the valley from without now that the chief enemy was within. David, in the pause, was directing Jacob to place the girl's saddle on the back of Abra.

"For it is not fitting," he explained, "that you should enter my garden save on one of my horses. And look, here is Glani."

The stallion came at the sound of his name. She had heard of the great horse from Connor, but the reality was far more than the words.

"And this, Glani, is Ruth."

She touched the velvet nose which was stretched inquisitively toward her, and then looked up and found that David was smiling. A moment later they were riding side by side down the avenue of the eucalyptus trees, and through the tall tree-trunks new vistas opened rapidly about her. Every stride of Abra seemed to carry her another step into the life of David.

"I should have called Shakra for you," said David, watching her with concern, "but she is ridden by another who has the right to the best in the Garden."

"Even Glani?"

"Even Glani, save that he fears to ride my horse, and therefore he has Shakra. I am sorry, for I wish to see you together. She is like you—beautiful, delicate, and swift."

She urged Abra into a shortened gallop with a touch of her heel, so that the business of managing him gave her a chance to cover her confusion. She could have smiled away a compliment, but the simplicity of David meant something more.

"Peace, Abra!" commanded the master. "Oh, unmannerly colt! It would be other than this if the wise Shakra were beneath your saddle."

"No, I am content with Abra. Let Shakra be for your servant."

"Not servant, but friend—a friend whom Glani chose for me. Consider how fickle our judgments are and how little things persuade us. Abraham is rich in words, but his face is ugly, and I prefer the smooth voice of Zacharias, though he is less wise. I have grieved for this and yet it is hard to change. But a horse is wiser than a fickle-minded man, and when Glani went to the hand of Benjamin without my order, I knew that I had found a friend."

She knew the secret behind that story, and now she looked at David with pity.

"In my house you will meet Benjamin," the master was saying thoughtfully, evidently encountering a grave problem. "I have said that little things make the judgments of men! If a young horse shies once, though he may become a true traveler and a wise head, yet his rider remembers the first jump and is ever uneasy in the saddle."

She nodded, wondering what lay behind the explanation.

"Or if a snake crosses the road before a horse, at that place the horse trembles when he passes again."

"Yes."

She found it strangely pleasant to follow the simple processes of his mind.

"It is so with Benjamin. At some time a woman crosses his way like a snake, and because of her he has come to hate all women. And when I started for the gate, even now, he warned me against you."

The clever mind of the gambler opened to her and she smiled at the trick.

"Yes, it is a thing for laughter," said David happily. "I came with a mind armed for trouble—and I find you, whom I could break between my hands."

He turned, casting out his arms.

"What harm have I received from you?"

They had reached the head of the bridge, and even as David turned a changing gust carried to them a chorus of men's voices. David drew rein.

"There is a death," he said, "in my household."

CHAPTER XXII.

ELIJAH.

THE singing took on body and form as the pitch rose.

"There is a death," repeated David. "Abraham is dead, the oldest and the wisest of my servants. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Glory to His name!"

Ruth was touched to the heart.

"I am sorry," she said simply.

"Let us rejoice, rather, for Abraham is happy. His soul is reborn in a young body. Do you not hear them singing? Let us ride on."

He kept his head high and a stereotyped smile on his lips as the horses sprang into a gallop—that breath-taking gallop which made the spirit of the girl leap; but she saw his breast raise once or twice with a sigh. It was the stoicism of an Indian, she felt, and like an Indian's was the bronze-brown skin and the long hair blowing in the wind. The lake was beside them now, and dense forest beyond opening into pleasant meadows. She was being carried back into a primitive time of which the type was the man beside her. Riding without a saddle his body gave to the swing of the gallop, and she was more conscious than ever of physical strength.

But now the hoofs beat softly on the lawn terraces, and in a moment they had stopped before the house where the death had been. She knew at once. The empty arch into the patio of the servants' house was eloquent, in some manner, of the life that had departed. Before it was the group of singers, all standing quiet, as though their own music had silenced them, or perhaps preparing to sing again. Connor had described the old negro, but she was not prepared for these straight, withered bodies, these bony, masklike faces, and the white heads.

All in an instant they seemed to see her, and a flash of pleasure went from face to face. They stirred, they came toward her

with glad murmurs, all except one, the oldest of them all, who remained aloof with his arms folded. But the others pressed close around her, talking excitedly to one another, as though she could not understand what they said. And she would never forget one who took her hand in both of his. The touch of his fingers was cold and as dry as parchment. "Honey, child, God bless your pretty face."

Was this the formal talk of which Connor had warned her? A growl from David drove them back from her like leaves before a wind. He had slipped from his horse, and now walked forward.

"It is Abraham?" he asked.

"He is dead and glorious," answered the chorus, and the girl trembled to hear those time-dried relics of humanity speak so cheerily of death.

The master was silent for a moment, then: "Did he leave no message for me?"

In place of answering the group shifted and opened a passage to the one in the rear, who stood with folded arms.

"Elijah, you were with him?"

"I heard his last words."

"And what dying message for David?"

"Death sealed his lips while he had still much to say. To the end he was a man of many words. But first he returned thanks to our Father who breathed life into the clay."

"That was a proper thought, and I see that the words were the words of Abraham."

"He gave thanks for a life of quiet ease and wise masters and he forgave the Lord the length of years he was kept in this world."

"In that," said David gravely, "I seem to hear his voice speaking. Continue."

"He commanded us to sing pleasantly when he was gone."

"I heard the singing on the lake road. It is well."

"Also, he bade us keep the first master in our minds, for John, he said, was the beginning."

At this the face of David clouded a little. "Continue. What word for David?"

Something that Connor had said about the pride and sulkiness of a child came back to Ruth.

Elijah, after hesitation, went on: "He declared that Glani is too heavy in the forehead."

"Yes, that is Abraham," said the master, smiling tenderly. "He would argue even on the death bed."

"But a cross with Tabari would remedy that defect."

"Perhaps. What more?"

"He blessed you and bade you remember and rejoice that he was gone to his wife and child."

"Ah?" cried David softly. His glance, wandering absently, rested on the girl for a moment, and then came back to Elijah. "His mind went back to that? What further for my ear?"

"I remember nothing more, David."

"Speak!" commanded the master.

The eyes of Elijah roved as though for help.

"Toward the end his voice grew faint and his mind seemed to wander."

"Far rather tremble, Elijah, if you keep back the words he spoke, however sharp they may be. My hand is not light. Remember, and speak."

The fear of Elijah changed to a gloomy pride, and now he not only raised his head, but he even made a step forward and stood in dignity.

"Death took Abraham by the throat, and yet he continued to speak. 'Tell David that four masters cherished Abraham, but David cast him out like a dog and broke his heart, and therefore he dies. Although I bless him, God will hereafter judge him!'"

A shudder went through the entire group, and Ruth herself was uneasy.

"Keep your own thoughts and the words of Abraham well divided," said David solemnly. "I know his mind and its working. Continue, but be warned."

"I am warned, David, but my brother Abraham is dead and my heart weeps for him!"

"God will hereafter judge me," said David harshly. "And what was the further judgment of Abraham, the old man?"

"Even this: 'David has opened the Garden to one and therefore it will be opened to all. The law is broken. The first sin is the hard sin and the others follow easily.

It is swift to run downhill. He has brought in one, and another will soon follow.'"

"Elijah," thundered David, "you have wrested his words to fit the thing you see."

"May the dead hand of Abraham strike me down if these were not his words."

"Had he become a prophet?" muttered David. "No, it was the maundering of an old man."

"God speaks on the lips of the dying, David."

"You have said enough."

"Wait!"

"You are rash, Elijah."

She could not see the face of David, but the terror and frenzied devotion of Elijah served her as a mirror to see the wrath of the master of the Garden.

"David has opened the gate of the Garden. The world sweeps in and shall carry away the life of Eden like a flood. All that four masters have done the fifth shall undo."

The strength of his ecstasy slid from Elijah and he dropped upon his knees with his head weighted toward the earth. The other negroes were frozen in their places. One who had opened his lips to speak, perhaps to intercede for the rash Elijah, remained with his lips parted, a staring mask of fear. In them Ruth saw the rage of David Eden, and she was sickened by what she saw. She had half pitied the simplicity of this man, this gull of the clever Connor. Now she loathed him as a savage barbarian. Even these old men were hardly safe from his furies of temper.

"Arise," said the master at length, and she could feel his battle to control his voice. "You are forgiven, Elijah, because of your courage—yet, beware! As for that old man whose words you repeated, I shall consider him." He turned on his heel, and Ruth saw that his face was iron.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TOP OF THE WORLD.

FROM the gate of the patio Connor, watching all that time in a nightmare of suspense, saw, first of all, the single figure of David come around the trees, David alone and walking. But before that

shock passed he saw Glani at the heels of the master, and then, farther back, Ruth!

She had passed the gate and two-thirds of the battle was fought and won. Yet all was not well, as he plainly saw. With long, swift steps David came over the terrace, and finally paused as if his thoughts had stopped him. He turned as Glani passed, and the girl came up to him; his extended arm halted Abra and he stood looking up to the girl and speaking. Only the faint murmur of his voice came unintelligibly to Connor, but he recognized danger in it as clearly as in the hum of bees. Suddenly the girl, answering, put out her hands as if in gesture of surrender. Another pause—it was only a matter of a second or so, but it was a space for life or death with Connor. In that interval he knew that his scheme was made or ruined. What had the girl said? Perhaps that mighty extended arm holding back Abra had frightened her, and with the wind blowing his long black hair aside, David of Eden was a figure wild enough to alarm her. Perhaps in fear of her life she had exposed the whole plan. If so, it meant broken bones for Connor.

But now David turned again, and this time he was talking by the side of Abra as they came up the hill. He talked with many gestures, and the girl was laughing down to him.

"God bless her!" muttered Connor impulsively. "She's a true-blue one!"

He remembered his part in the nick of time as they came closer, and David helped the girl down from the saddle and brought her forward. The gambler drew himself up and made his face grave with disapproval. Now or never he must prove to David that there was no shadow of a connection between him and the girl. Yet he was by no means easy. There was something forced and stereotyped in the smile of the girl that told him she had been through a crucial test and was still near the breaking point.

David presented them to one another uneasily. He was even a little embarrassed under the accusing eye of Connor.

"I make you known, Ruth," he said, "to my brother Benjamin. He is that man of whom I told you."

"I am happy," said the girl, "to be known to him."

"That much I cannot say," replied the gambler.

He turned upon David with outstretched arm.

"Ah, David, I have warned you!"

"As Abraham warned me against you, Benjamin. And dying men speak truth."

The counter-attack was so shrewd, so unexpected, that the gambler, for the moment, was thrown completely off his guard.

He could only murmur: "You are the judge for yourself, David."

"I am. Do not think that the power is in me. But God loves the Garden and His voice is never far from me. Neither are the spirits of the four who lived here before me and made this place. When there is danger they warn me. When I am in error the voice of God corrects me. And just as I heard the voice against the woman, Ruth, and heed it not."

He seemed to have gathered conviction for himself, much needed conviction, as he spoke. He turned now toward the girl.

"Be not wroth with Benjamin; and bear him no malice."

"I bear him none in the world," she answered truthfully, and held out her hand.

But Connor was still in his rôle. He folded his arms and pointedly disregarded the advance.

"Woman, let there be peace and few words between us. My will is the will of David."

"There speaks my brother!" cried the master of the valley.

"And yet," muttered Connor, "why is she here?"

"She came to buy a horse."

"But they are not sold."

"That is true. Yet she has traveled far and she is in great need of food and drink. Could I turn her away hungry, Benjamin?"

"She could have been fed at the gate. She could surely have rested there."

It was easy to see that David was hard-pressed. His eye roved eagerly to Ruth. Then a triumphant explanation sparkled in his eye.

"It is the horse she rides, a gelding from my Garden. His lot in the world has been

hard. He is scarred with the spur and the whip. I have determined to take him back, at a price. But who can arrange matters of buying and selling all in a moment? It is a matter for much talk. Therefore she is here."

"I am answered," said Connor, and turning to Ruth he winked broadly.

"It is well," said David, "and I foresee happy days. In the meantime there is a duty before me. Abraham must be laid in his grave and I leave Ruth to your keeping, Benjamin. Bear with her tenderly for my sake."

He stepped to the girl.

"You are not afraid?"

"I am not afraid," she answered.

"My thoughts shall be near you. Farewell."

He had hardly reached the gate of the patio when Joseph, going out after finishing his labor at the fountain, passed between the gambler and the girl. Connor stopped him with a sign.

"The whip hasn't fallen, you see," he said maliciously to the negro.

"There is still much time," replied Joseph. "And before the end it will fall. Perhaps on you. Or on that!"

He indicated the girl with his pointing finger; his glance turned savagely from one to the other, and then he went slowly out of the patio and they were alone. She came to Connor at once and even touched his arm in her excitement.

"What did he mean?"

"That's the one I told you about. The one David beat up with the whip. He'd give his eye teeth to get back at me, and he has an idea that there's going to be hell to pay because another person has come into the valley. Bunk! I can handle a hundred of these boobs, black and white. But—what happened down the hill?"

"When he stopped me? Did you see that?"

"My heart stopped the same minute. What was it?"

"He had just heard the last words of Abraham. When he stopped me on the hill his face was terrible. Like a wolf!"

"I know that look in him! How did you buck up under it?"

"I didn't. I felt my blood turn to water and I wanted to run."

"But you stuck it out—I saw! Did he say anything?"

"He said: 'Dying men do not lie.' And I have been twice warned. Woman, why are you here?"

"And you?" gasped Connor. "What did you say?"

"Nothing. My head spun. I looked up the terrace. I wanted to see you, but you weren't in sight. I felt terribly alone and absolutely helpless. If I'd had a gun I would have reached for it."

"Thank God you didn't!"

"But you don't know what his face was like! I expected him to tear me off the horse and smash me with his hands. All at once I wanted to tell him everything—beg him not to hurt me." Connor groaned.

"I knew it! I knew that was in your head!"

"But I didn't."

"Good girl."

"He said: 'Why are you here? What harm have you come to work in the Garden?'"

"And you alone with him!" gasped Connor.

"That was what did it. I was so helpless that it made me bold. Can you imagine smiling at a time like that?"

"Were you able to?"

"I don't know how. It took every ounce of strength in me. But I made myself smile—straight into his face. Then I put out my hands to him all at once.

"How could I harm you?" I asked him.

"And then you should have seen his face change and the anger break up like a cloud. I knew I was safe, then, but I was still dizzy—just as if I'd looked over a cliff—you know?"

"And yet you rode up the hill after that laughing down to him! Ruth, you're the gamest sport and the best pal in the world. The finest little act I ever saw on the stage or off. It was Big Time stuff. My hat's off, but—where'd you get the nerve?"

"I was frightened almost to death. Too much frightened for it to show. When I saw you, some of my strength came back. But what do you think of him?"

"He's—simply a savage. What do I think of an Indian?"

"No more than that?"

"Ben, can you pet a tiger after you've seen his claws?"

He looked at her with anxiety.

"You're not going to break down later on—feeling as if he's dynamite about to explode all the time?"

"I'm going to play the game through," she said with a sort of fierce happiness. "I've felt like a sneak thief about this. But now it's different. He's more of a wolf than a man. Ben, I saw murder in his face, I swear! And if it isn't wrong to tame wild beasts it isn't wrong to tame him. I'm going to play the game, lead him as far as I can until we get the horses—and then it'll be easy enough to make up by being good the rest of my life."

"Ruth—girl—you've covered the whole ground. And when you have the coin—" He broke off with laughter that was filled with drunken excitement. "But what did you think of my game?"

She did not hear him, and standing with her hands clasped lightly behind her she looked beyond the roof of the house and over the tops of the western mountains, with the sun-haze about them.

"I feel as if I were on the top of the world," she said at last. "And I wouldn't have one thing changed. We're playing for big stakes, but we're taking a chance that makes the game worth while. What we win we'll earn—because he's a devil. Isn't it what you'd call a fair bet?"

"The squarest in the world," said Connor stoutly.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FLOWER OF DAVID.

THEY had no means of knowing when David would return and the ominous shadow of Joseph, lingering near the patio, determined Connor on a walk out of any possible earshot. They went down to the lake with the singing of the negroes on the other side of the hill growing dim as they descended. The cool of the day was beginning, and they walked close to the

edge of the water with the brown tree-trunks on one side and the green images floating beyond. Peace lay over Eden valley and the bright river that ran through it, but Ben Connor had no mind to dwell on unessentials.

He had found in the girl an ally of unexpected strength. He expected only a difficult tool filled with scruples, drawing back, imperiling his plans with her hesitation. Instead, she was on fire with the plan. He thought well to fan that fire and keep it steadily blazing.

"It's better for David; better for him than it is for us. Look at the poor simp! He's in prison here and doesn't know it. He thinks he's happy, but he's simply kidding himself. Nothing but a gang of black-faces around him. In six months I'll have him chatting with millionaires."

"Let a barber do a day's work on him first."

"No. It's just the long-haired nuts like that who get by with the high-steppers. He has a lingo about flowers and trees that'll knock their eye out. I know the gang. Always on edge for something different—music that sounds like a riot in a junk shop and poetry that reads like a drunken printing-press. Well, David ought to be different enough to suit 'em. I'll boost him, though: 'The Man that Brought Out the Eden Grays!' He'll be headline stuff!"

He laughed so heartily that he did not notice the quick glance of criticism which the girl cast at him.

"I'm not taking anything from him, really," went on Connor. "I'm simply sneaking around behind him so's I can pour his pockets full of the coin. That's all there is to it. Outside of the looks, tell me if there's anything crooked you can see?"

"I don't think there is," she murmured. "I almost hope that there isn't!"

She was so dubious about it that Connor was alarmed. He was fond of Ruth Manning, but she was just "different" enough to baffle him. Usually he divided mankind into three or four categories for the sake of fast thinking. There were the "boobs", the "regular guys", the "high steppers",

and the "nuts". Sometimes he came perilously close to including Ruth in the last class—with David Eden. And if he did not do so, it was mainly because she had given such an exhibition of cool courage only a few moments before. He had finished his peroration, now, with a feeling of actual virtue, but the shadow on her face made him change his tactics and his talk.

He confined himself, thereafter, strictly to the future. First he outlined his plans for raising the cash for the big "killing". He told of the men to whom he could go for backing. There were "hard guys" who would take a chance. "Wise ones" who would back his judgment. "Fall guys" who would follow him blindly. For ten percent he would get all the cash he could place. Then it remained to try out the grays in secret, and in public let them go through the paces ridden under wraps and heavily weighed. He described the means of placing the big money before the great race.

And as he talked his figures mounted from tens to hundreds to thousands, until he was speaking in millions. In all of this profit she and David and Connor would share dollar for dollar. At the first corner of the shore they turned she had arrived at a snug apartment in New York. She would have a house-keeper-companion, some friendly woman whom adverse circumstances had placed in the servant class. There would be a cosy living room and a paneled dining room. In the entrance hall of the apartment house, imitation of en-crusted marble, no doubt.

But as they came opposite a little wooded island in the lake she had added a maid to the housekeeper. Also, there was now a guest room. Some one from Lukin would be in that room; some one from Lukin would go through the place with her, marveling at her good fortune.

And clothes! They made all the difference. Dressed as she would be dressed, when she came into a room that queer, cold gleam of envy would be in the eyes of the women and the man would sit straighter!

Yet when they reached the place where the shore line turned north and west her imagination, spurred by Connor's talk, was

stumbling along dizzy heights. Her apartment occupied a whole floor. Her butler was a miracle of dignity and her chef a genius in the kitchen. On the great table the silver and glass were things of frosted light. Her chauffeur drove a monster automobile with a great purring engine that whipped her about the city with the color blown into her cheeks. In her box at the opera she was allowing the deep, soft luxury of the fur collar to slide down from her throat, while along the boxes, in the galleries, there was a ripple of light as the thousand glasses turned upon her. Then she found that Connor was smiling at her. She flushed, but snapped her fingers.

"This thing is going through," she declared.

"You won't weaken?"

"I'm as cold as steel. Let's go back. He'll probably be in the house by this time."

Time had slipped past her unnoticed, and the lake was violet and gold with the sunset as they turned away; under the trees along the terraces the brilliant wild flowers were dimmed by a blue shadow.

"But I never saw wild flowers like those," she said to Connor.

"Nobody else ever did. But old Matthew, whoever he was, grew 'em and kept crossing 'em until he got those big fellows with all the colors of the rainbow."

"Hurry! We're late!"

"No, David's probably on top of that hill, now; always goes up there to watch the sun rise and the sun set. Can you beat that?"

He chuckled, but a shade had darkened the face of the girl for a moment. Then she lifted her head resolutely.

"I'm not going to try to understand him. The minute you understand a thing you stop being afraid of it; and as soon as I stop being afraid of David Eden I might begin to like him—which is what I don't want."

"What's that?" cried Connor, breaking in on her last words. When Ruth began to think aloud he always stopped listening; it was a maxim of his to never listen when a woman became serious.

"It's that negro with the ape-face."

"Joseph!" exclaimed Connor heavily. "Whipping did him no good. He'll need killing one of these days."

But she had already reverted to another thing.

"Do you think he worships the sun?"

"I don't think. Try to figure out a fellow like that and you get to be just as much of a nut as he is. Go on toward the house and I'll follow you in a minute. I want to talk to big Joë."

He turned aside into the trees briskly, and the moment he was out of sight of the girl he called softly: "Joseph!"

He repeated the call after a trifling wait before he saw the big negro coming unconcernedly through the trees toward him. Joseph came close before he stopped—very close, as a man will do when he wishes to make another aware of his size, and from this point of vantage, he looked over Connor from head to foot with a glance of lingering and insolent criticism. The gambler was somewhat amused and a little alarmed by that attitude.

"Now, Joseph," he said, "tell me frankly why you're dodging me about the valley. Waiting for a chance to throw stones?"

His smile remained without a reflection on the stolid face of the servant.

"Benjamin," answered the deep, solemn voice, "I know all!"

It made Connor peer into those broad, animal features as into a dim light. Then a moment of reflection assured him that Joseph could not have learned the secret.

"Haneemar, whom you know," continued Joseph, "has told me about you."

"And where," asked Connor, completely at sea, "did you learn of Haneemar?"

"From Abraham. And I know that this is the head of Haneemar."

He brought out in his palm the little watch-charm of carved ivory.

"Of course," nodded Connor, feeling his way. "And what is it that you know from Haneemar?"

"That you are evil, Benjamin, and that you have come here for evil. You entered by a trick; and you will stay here for evil purposes until the end."

"You follow around to pick up a little

dope, eh?" chuckled Connor. "You trail me to find out what I intend to do? Why don't you go to David and warn him?"

"Have I forgotten the whip?" asked Joseph, his nostrils trembling with anger. "But the good Haneemar now gives me power and in the end he will betray you into my hands. That is why I follow you. Wherever you go I follow; I am even able to know what you think! But hearken to me, Benjamin. Take back the head of Haneemar and the bad luck that lives in it. Take it back, and I shall no longer follow you. I shall forget the whip. I shall be ready to do you a service."

He extended the little piece of ivory eagerly, but Connor drew back. His superstitions were under the surface of his mind, but, still, they were there, and the fear which Joseph showed was contagious.

"Why don't you throw it away if you're afraid of it, Joseph?"

"You know as I know," returned Joseph, glowering, "that it cannot be thrown away. It must be given and freely accepted, as I—oh fool—accepted it from you."

There was such a profound conviction in this that Connor was affected in spite of himself. That little trinket had been the entering wedge through which he had worked his way into the Garden and started on the road to fortune. He would rather have cut off his hand, now, than take it back.

"Find some one else to take it," he suggested cheerily. "I don't want the thing."

"Then all that Abraham told me is true!" muttered Joseph, closing his hand over the trinket. "But I shall follow you, Benjamin. When you think you are alone you shall find me by turning your head. Every day by sunrise and every day by the dark I beg Haneemar to put his curse on you. I have done you no wrong, and you have had me shamed."

"And now you're going to have me bewitched, eh?" asked Connor.

"You shall see."

The gambler drew back another pace and through the shadows he saw the beginning of a smile of animal-cunning on the face of Joseph.

"The devil take you and Haneemar together," he growled. "Remember this, Joseph. I've had you whipped once. The next time I'll have you flayed alive."

Instead of answering, Joseph merely grinned more openly, and the gambler, to forget the ape-face, wheeled and hurried out from the trees. The touch of nightmare dread did not leave him until he rejoined Ruth on the higher terrace.

They found the patio glowing with light, the table near the fountain, and three chairs around it. David came out of the shadow of the arcade to meet them, and he was as uneasy as a boy who has a surprise for grown-ups. He had not even time for a greeting.

"You have not seen your room?" he said to Ruth. "I have made it ready for you. Come!"

He led the way half a pace in front, glancing back at them as though to reprove their slowness, until he reached a door at which he turned and faced her, laughing with excitement. She could hardly believe that this man with his childish gayety was the same whose fury had terrified the negroes that same afternoon.

"Close your eyes—close them fast. You will not look until I say?"

She obeyed, setting her teeth to keep from smiling.

"Now come forward—step high for the doorway. So! You are in. Now wait—now open your eyes and look!"

She obeyed again and saw first David standing back with an anxious smile and the gesture of one who reveals, but is not quite sure of its effect. Then she heard a soft, startled exclamation from Connor behind her. Last of all she saw the room.

It was as if the walls had been broken down and a garden let inside—it gave an effect of open air, sunlight and wind. Purple flowers like warm shadows baked the farther corners, and out of them rose a great vine draping the window. It had been torn bodily from the earth, and now the roots were packed with damp moss, yellow-green. It bore in clusters and single flowers and abundant bloom, each blossom as large as the mallow, and a dark gold so rich that Ruth well-nigh listened for the

murmur of bees working this mine of pollen. From above, the great flowers hung down against the dull red of the sunset sky; and from below the distant tree-tops on the terrace pointed up with glimmers of the lake between. There was only the reflected light of the evening, now, but the cup like blossoms were filled to the brim with a glow of their own.

She looked away.

A dapple deer-skin covered the bed like the shadow under a tree in mid-day, and the yellow of the flowers was repeated dimly on the floor by a great, tawny hide of a mountain-lion. She took up some of the purple flowers, and letting the velvet petals trail over her finger tips, she turned to David with a smile. But what Connor saw, and saw with a thrill of alarm, was that her eyes were filling with tears.

"See!" said David gloomily. "I have done this to make you happy, and now you are sad!"

"Because it is so beautiful"

"Yes," said David slowly. "I think I understand."

But Connor took one of the flowers from her hand. She cried out, but too late to keep him from ripping the blossom to pieces, and now he held up a single petal, long, gracefull, red-purple at the broader end and deep yellow at the narrow.

"Think of that a million times bigger," said Connor, "and made out of velvet. That'd be a design for a cloak, eh? Cost about a thousand bucks to imitate this petal, but it'd be worth it to see you in it, eh?"

She looked to David with a smile of apology for Connor, but her hand accepted the petal, and her second smile was for Connor himself.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WIND OF DAVID.

WHEN they went out into the patio again, David had lost a large part of his bouyancy of spirits, as though in some subtle manner Connor had overcast the triumph of the room; he left them with word that the evening meal

would soon be ready and hurried off calling orders to Zacharias.

"Why did you do it?" she asked Connor as soon as they were alone.

"Because it made me mad to see a stargazer like that turning your head."

"But didn't you think the room was beautiful?"

"Sure. Like a riot in a florist's shop. But don't let this David take you off guard with his rooms full of flowers and full of silence."

"Silence?"

"Haven't I told you about his Room of Silence? That's one of his queer dodges. That room; you see? When anything bothers him he goes over and sits down in there, because—do you know what he thinks sits with him?"

"Well?"

"God!"

She was between a smile and a gasp.

"Yep, that's David," grinned Connor.

"Just plain nut."

"What's inside?"

"I don't know. Maybe flowers."

"Let's find out."

He caught her arm quickly.

"Not in a thousand years!" He changed color at the thought and glanced guiltily around. "That would be the smash of everything. Why, he turned over the whole Garden of Eden to me. I can go anywhere, but not a step inside that room. It's his Holy Ground, you see! Maybe it's where he keeps his jack. And I've a hunch that he has a slough of it tucked away somewhere."

She raised her hand as an idea came to her half way through this speech.

"Listen! I have an idea that the clew to all of David's mystery is in that room!"

"Drop that idea, Ruth," he ordered gruffly. "You've seen David on one rampage, but it's nothing to what would happen if you so much as peeked into that place. When the negroes pass that door they take off their hats—watch 'em the next time you have a chance. You won't make a slip about that room?"

"No." But she added: "I'd give my soul—for one look!"

Dinner that night under the stars with

the whispering of the fountain beside them was a ceremony which Connor never forgot. The moon rose late and in the meantime the sky was heavy and dark with sheeted patchwork of clouds, with the stars showing here and there. The wind blew in gusts. A wave began with a whisper on the hill, came with a light rushing across the patio, and then diminished quickly among the trees down the terraces. Rough, iron-framed lanterns gave the light and showed the arcade stepping away on either side and growing dim toward the entrance. That uncertain illumination made the crude pillars seem to have only the irregularity of vast antiquity, stable masses of stone. Where the circle of lantern-light overlapped rose the fountain, a pale spray forever dissolving in the upper shadow. Connor himself was more or less used to these things, but he became newly aware of them as the girl sent quick, eager glances here and there.

She had placed a single one of the great yellow blossoms in her hair and it changed her shrewdly. It brought out the delicate coloring of her skin, and to the darkness of her eyes it lent a tint of violet. Plainly she enjoyed the scene with its newness. David, of course, was the spice to everything, and his capitulation was complete; he kept the girl always on an uneasy balance between happiness and laughter. And Connor trembled for fear the mirth would show through. But each change of her expression appeared to delight David more than the last.

Under his deft knife the choicest white meat came away from the breast of a chicken and he heaped it at once on the plate of Ruth. Then he dropped his chin upon his great brown fist and watched with silent delight while she ate. It embarrassed her; but her flush had a tinge of pleasure in it, as Connor very well knew.

"Look!" said David, speaking softly as though Ruth would not hear him. "How pleasant it is, to be three together. When we were two, one talked and the other grew weary—was it not so? But now we are complete. One speaks, one listens, and the other judges. I have been alone. The Garden of Eden has been to me a prison, at many times. And now there is nothing

wanting. And why? There were many men before. We were not lacking in numbers. Yet there was an emptiness, and now comes one small creature, as delicate as a colt of three months, this being of smiles and curious glances, this small voice, this woman—and at once the gap is filled. Is it not strange?"

He cast himself back in his chair, as though he wished to throw her into perspective with her surroundings, and all the time he was staring as though she were an image, a picture, and not a thing of flesh and blood. Connor himself was on the verge of a smile, but when he saw the face of Ruth Manning his mirth disappeared in a chill of terror. She was struggling and struggling in vain against a rising tide of laughter, laughter in the face of David Eden and his sensitive pride.

It came, it broke through all bonds, and now it was bubbling from her lips. As one who awaits the falling of a blow, Connor glanced furtively at the host, and again he was startled.

There was not a shade of evil temper in the face of David. He leaned forward, indeed, with a surge of the great shoulders, but it was as one who listens to an entrancing music. And when she ceased, abruptly, he sighed.

"Speak to me," he commanded.

She murmured a faint reply.

"Again," said David, half closing his eyes. And Connor nodded a frantic encouragement to her.

"But what shall I say?"

"For the meaning of what you say," said David, "I have no care, but only for the sound. Have you heard dripping in a well, a sound like water filling a bottle and never reaching the top? It keeps you listening for an hour, perhaps, always a soft sound, but always rising toward a climax? Or a drowsy day when the wind hardly moves and the whistling of a bird comes now and then out of the trees, cool and contented? Or you pass a meadow of flowers in the warm sun and hear the ground murmur of the bees, and you think at once of the wax films of the honeycomb, and the clear golden honey? All those things I heard and saw when you spoke."

"Plain nut!" said Connor, framing the words with silent lips.

But though her eyes rested on him, apparently she did not see his face. She looked back at Connor with a wistful little half-smile.

At once David cast out both his hands toward hers.

"Ah, you are strange, new, delightful!" He stopped abruptly. Then: "Does it make you happy to hear me say these things?"

"Why do you ask me that?" she said curiously.

"Because it fills me with unspeakable happiness to say them. If I am silent and only think then I am not so pleased. When I see Glani standing on the hill-top I feel his speed in the slope of his muscles, the flaunt of his tail, the pride of his head; but when I gallop him, and the wind of his galloping strikes my face—ha, that is a joy! So it is speaking with you. When I see you I say within: 'She is beautiful!' But when I speak it aloud your lips tremble a little toward a smile, your eyes darken with pleasure, and then my heart rises into my throat and I wish to speak again and again and again to find new things to say, to say old things in new words. So that I may watch the changes in your face. Do you understand? But now you blush. Is that a sign of anger?"

"It is a sign that no other men have ever talked to me in this manner."

"Then other men are fools. What I say is true. I feel it ring in me, that it is the truth. Benjamin, my brother, is it not so? Ha!"

She was raising the wine-cup; he checked her with his eager, extended hand.

"See, Benjamin, how this mysterious thing is done, this raising of the hand. We raise the cup to drink. An ugly thing—let it be done and forgotten. But when *she* lifts the cup it is a thing to be remembered; how her fingers curve and the weight of the cup presses into them, and how her wrist droops."

She lowered the cup hastily and put her hand before her face.

"I see," said Connor dryly.

"Bah!" cried the master of the Garden.

"You do not see. But you, Ruth, are you angry? Are you shamed?"

He drew down her hands, frowning with intense anxiety. Her face was crimson.

"No," she said faintly.

"He says that he sees, but he does not see," went on David. "He is blind, this Benjamin of mine. I show him my noblest grove of the eucalyptus trees, each tree as tall as a hill, as proud as a king, as beautiful as a thought that springs up from the earth. I show him these glorious trees. What does he say? 'You could build a whole town out of that wood!' Bah! Is that seeing? No, he is blind! Such a man would give you hard work to do. But I say to you, Ruth, that to be beautiful is to be wise, and industrious, and good. Surely you are to me like the rising of the sun—my heart leaps up! And you are like the coming of the night making the world beautiful and mysterious. For behind your eyes and behind your words, out of the sound of your voice and your glances, I guess at new things, strange things, hidden things. Treasures which cannot be held in the hands. Should you grow as old as Elijah, withered, meager as a grasshopper, the treasures would still be there. I, who have seen them, can never forget them!"

Once more she covered her eyes with her hand, and David started up from his chair.

"What have I done?" he asked faintly of Connor. He hurried around the table to her. "Look up! How have I harmed you?"

"I am only tired," she said.

"I am a fool! I should have known. Come!" said David.

He drew her from the chair and led her across the lawn, supporting her. At her door: "May sleep be to you like the sound of running water," murmured David.

And when the door was closed he went hastily back to Connor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

POLITICS.

"WHAT have I done? What have I done?" he kept moaning. "She is in pain. I have hurt her."

"Sit down," said Connor, deeply amused,

It had been a curious revelation to him, this open talk of a man who was falling in love. He remembered the way he had proposed to a girl, once: "Say, Betty, don't you think you and me would hit it off pretty well, speaking permanently?"

This flaunting language was wholly ludicrous to Connor. It was book-stuff.

David had obeyed him with childlike docility, and sat now like a pupil about to be corrected by the master.

"That point is this," explained Connor gravely. "You have the wrong idea. As far as I can make out, you like Ruth?"

"It is a weak word. Bah! It is not enough."

"But it's enough to tell her. You see, men outside of the Garden don't talk to a girl the way you do, and it embarrasses her to have you talk about her all the time."

"Is it true?" murmured the penitent David. "Then what should I have said?"

"Well—er—you might have said—that the flower went pretty well in her hair, and let it go at that."

"But it was more, more, more! Benjamin, my brother, these hands of mine picked that very flower. And I see that it has pleased her. She had taken it up and placed it in her hair. It changes her. My flower brings her close to me. It means that we have found a thing which pleases us both. Just as you and I, Benjamin, are drawn together by the love of one horse. So that flower in her hair is a great sign. I dwell upon it. It is like a golden moon rising in a black night. It lights my way to her. Words rush up from my heart, but cannot express what I mean!"

"Let it go! Let it go!" said Connor hastily, brushing his way through this outflow of verbiage, like a man bothered with gnats. "I gather what you mean. But the point is that about nine-tenths of what you think you'd better not say. If you want to talk—well, talk about yourself. That's what I most generally do with a girl. They like to hear a man say what he's done."

"Myself!" said David heavily. "Talk of a dead stump when there is a great tree beside it? Well, I see that I have much to learn."

"You certainly have," said Connor with much meaning. "I'd hate to turn you loose in Manhattan."

"In what?"

"Never mind. But here's another thing. You know that she'll have to leave pretty soon?"

The meaning slowly filtered into David's mind.

"Benjamin," he said slowly, "you are wise in many ways, with horses and with women, it seems. But that is a fool's talk. Let me hear no more of it. Leave me? Why should she leave me?"

Triumph warmed the heart of Connor.

"Because a girl can't ramble off into the mountains and put up in a valley where there are nothing but men. It isn't done."

"Why not?"

"Isn't good form."

"I fail to understand."

"My dear fellow, she'd be compromised for life if it were known that she had lived here with us."

David shook his head blankly.

"In one word," said Connor, striving to make his point, "she'd be pointed out by other women and by men. They'd never have anything to do with her. They'd say things that would make her ashamed, hurt her, you know."

Understanding and wrath gathered in David's face.

"To such a man—to such a dog of a man—I would talk with my hands!"

"I think you would," nodded Connor, not a little impressed. "But you might not be around to hear the talk."

"But women surely live with men. There are wives—"

"Ah! Man and wife—all very well!"

"Then it is simple. I marry her and then I keep her here forever."

"Perhaps. But will she marry you?"

"Why not?"

"Well, does she love you?"

"True." He stood up. "I'll ask her."

"For Heaven's sake, no! Sit down! You mustn't rush at a woman like this the first day you know her. Give her time. Let me tell you when!"

"Benjamin, my dear brother, you are wise and I am a fool!"

"You'll do in time. Let me coach you, that's all, and you'll come on famously. I can tell you this: that I think she likes you very well already."

"Your words are like a shower of light, a fragrant wind. Benjamin, I am hot with happiness! When may I speak to her?"

"I don't know. She may have guessed something out of what you said to-night." He swallowed a smile. "You might speak to her about this marriage to-morrow."

"It will be hard; but I shall wait."

"And then you'll have to go out of the Garden with her to get married."

"Out of the Garden? Never! Why should we?"

"Why, you'll need a minister, you know, to marry you."

"True. Than I shall send for one."

"But he might not want to make this long journey for the sake of one marriage ceremony."

"There are ways, perhaps, of persuading him to come," said David, making a grim gesture.

"No force or you ruin everything."

"I shall be ruled by you, brother. It seems I have little knowledge."

"Go easy always and you'll come out all right. Give her plenty of time. A woman always needs a lot of time to make up her mind, and even then she's generally wrong."

"What do you mean by that?"

"No matter. She'll probably want to go back to her home for a while."

"Leave me?"

"Not necessarily. But you, when a man gets engaged, it's sometimes a couple of years between the time a woman promises to marry him and the day of the ceremony."

"Do they wait so long, and live apart?"

"A thousand miles, maybe."

"Then you men beyond the mountains are made of iron!"

"Do you have to be away from her? Why not go along with her when she goes home?"

"Surely, Benjamin, you know that a law forbids it!"

"You make your own laws in important things like this."

"It cannot be."

And so the matter rested when Connor

left his host and went to bed. He had been careful not to press the point. So unbelievably much ground had been covered in the first few hours that he was dizzy with success. It seemed ages since that Ruth had come running to him in the patio in terror of her life. From that moment how much had been done!

Closing his eyes as he lay on his bed, he went back over each incident to see if a false step had been made. As far as he could see, there had not been a single unsound measure undertaken. The first stroke had been the masterpiece. Out of a danger which had threatened instant destruction of their plan she had won complete victory by her facing of David, and when she put her hand in his as a sign of weakness, Connor could see that she had made David her slave.

As the scene came back vividly before his eyes he could not resist an impulse to murmur aloud to the dark: "Brave girl!"

She had grown upon him marvelously in

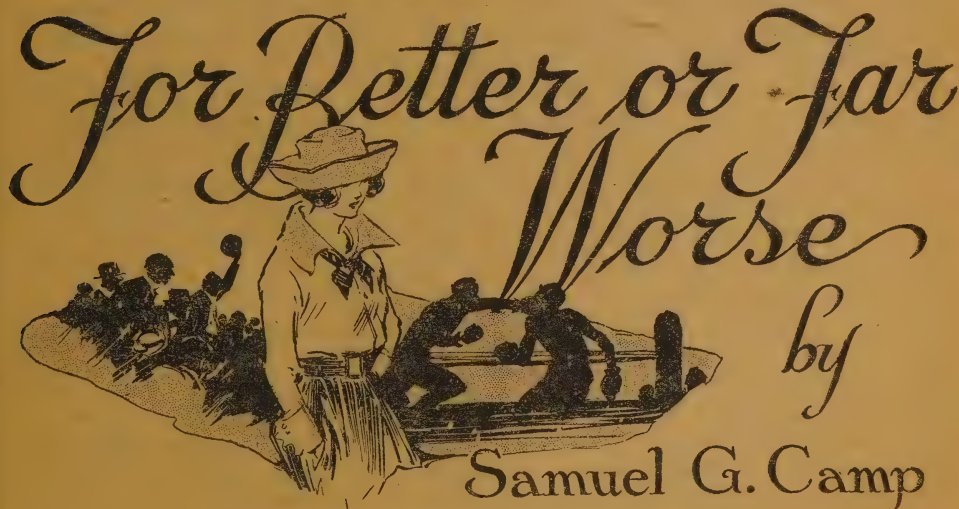
that single half-day. The ability to rise to a great situation was something which he admired above all things in man or woman. It was his own peculiar power—to judge a man or a horse in a glance, and dare to venture a fortune on chance. Indeed, it was hardly a wonder that David Eden or any other man should have fallen in love with her in that one half-day. She was changed beyond recognition from the pale girl who sat at the telegraph key in Lukin and listened to the babble of the world. Now she was out in that world, acting on the stage and proving herself worthy of a rôle.

He rehearsed her acts. And finally he found himself flushing hotly at the memory of her mingled pleasure and shame and embarrassment as David of Eden had poured out his amazing flow of compliments.

At this point Connor sat up suddenly and violently in his bed.

"Steady, Ben!" he cautioned himself. "Watch your step!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



NO doubt marriage is a grand and glorious institution. But there's times when—well, right now, for example, if I had my way about it, I'd tell the world that a certain Miss Dorothy Kent sure was one girl in a thousand! Owing, however, to circumstances over which I have little or no control, I—well, anyway, she was *two* girls in a thousand, the other, of course, as

you may of guessed, being no less than my beautiful and accomplished wife.

And now, having got round that little difficulty in a manner which ought to give the diplomatic squad in Washington some trouble in laughing off—why, maybe you'd like to hear how come that highly flattering opinion of mine with respect to the lovely and likewise clever Miss Kent.

Well, the beginning was no doubt when a husky young gent with a genial smile and a tin ear, and who does his stuff under the *nom de plume* of Jack Casey, gets himself elected president of the heavyweight box-fighters of Dry Country, 'Tis of Thee by the overwhelming majority of one thousand two hundred and forty-four hearty socks over the opposing candidate, who, after caroming off a hospital, fades out of the picture in the general direction of that bourn from which, as the poet says, no champ returneth. They never come back.

Now if, in turn, Mr. Casey had only of had the politeness or something to in due time permit somebody to pop him on the chin, followed by Mr. Casey touring the twilight circuit for an engagement of ten seconds, why no doubt it would of personally saved me the pleasure of passing through what the French or some of the other Allies calls one very bad quarter of an hour—though, as a matter of fact, it didn't last that long.

But nothing like that. Instead, at the end of something like several years, Mr. Casey was still clinging to his much-prized title like what's-his-name, Horatius, the great bridge champion, once holds thirteen trumps or something. And a situation had come up which was a good deal like the one when the great White Hope hunt was on, and which, as you very likely remember, resulted in the reluctant Mr. Jeffries coming out of his retirement, and the unconscious Mr. Jeffries going back to it.

In a word, Mr. Casey having knocked all comers, as they're known to the trade, for the conventional row of shanties—why, that's all there was, there wasn't any more. There was nobody left in sight that had a Chinaman's chance with the title-holder.

And I probably don't have to say that this was a state of affairs which was highly unsatisfactory to all concerned—including Mr. Casey, who was forced to struggle along as best he could on the measly two thousand dollars per week, or thereabouts, which he dragged down for working, so to say, an hour or so a day on the vaudeville circuits, the movie lots, and the like.

So that was the way things was when one day I met up with a friend of mine,

Walter McKettrick by name, who tapped a wicked typewriter in the sport department of one of our leading dailies. Well, probably Walter won't ever burn up the old planet. But you got to hand it to him for one thing, anyway: he sure is right up and coming all the time.

What you might call a self-sufficient kind of guy, Walter is, and never at a loss for an idea, if you know what I mean. Why, Walter would no more hesitate about telling Mr. Will Hays, for example, how to stage a Presidential campaign than he would about telling Mr. George M. Cohan all about how to put on a musical show. And I wouldn't be surprised if Will and George might learn something to their advantage, at that.

I might say, however, that I've got some personal reasons for thinking that some of Walter's stuff ain't no good. No, sir; not so good!

Anyway, I met up with Walter; and, having settled several matters of international importance and which had Parliament, the Senate, Congress, and W. J. Bryan hanging on the ropes, Walter finally gets round to the topic of how the heavyweight division still seems to be drifting in what Mr. McKettrick calls the well-known doldrums.

"Doldrums is right," I says. "Whatever they are. Say, I only wish I had one of them handy little household articles such as who's this, Aladdin, had."

"How do you mean?" asks Walter.

"Why," I says, "after applying the necessary amount of friction, I'd wish me some bird that could hand Mr. Jack Casey one very proper pasting!"

"Well," says Walter, "if you want to get a man capable of defeating the champion, why don't you get one?"

"Just like that, eh?" I comes back. "Say, why don't I get a million bucks or something? How d'ye mean, get one?"

"What do people generally do when they want something they haven't got?" counters Walter.

"Why," I says, "just now the simple but efficient blackjack seems to be mostly in favor in our best criminal circles. You see—"

Looked like my stuff didn't go so big

with Walter, however. For, "I ask you again," he cuts in. "What do—"

"Oh, all right," I says. "I'll bite. What do they do?"

"Advertise!" says Mr. McKettrick.

"Advertise!" I gasps. "Why, how d'you mean? 'Wanted: Young man to knock Champion Jack Casey for a goal; no references required. Apply, *et cetera*, and bring your own floral wreaths. Line forms on the right!' Something like that? Why, whoever heard of such a thing?"

"Nobody," says Mr. McKettrick with an air of being no more pleased with himself than a bootlegger with a new million. "It's original!"

"All of that!" I says.

I thought for a minute. "Walter," I says then, "d'ye know, I think you've got an idea!"

"Often get 'em," says the young journalist with becoming modesty.

"But how—" I starts.

"Leave it to me," says Walter. "I'll write the ad and see that it gets a good position. What's more, I'm going to play it up big on the sport page, too. Say, this is goin' to be good! It's a knockout! New stuff, Joe! New stuff! But keep this under your hat, see? This is one for the paper—get me?"

"Right with you, Walter," I says. "And God save Jack Casey!"

Say—if I'd thought, I'd of put in a word for myself!

Well, the ad come out in next morning's paper, and was to the general effect that all such as was subject to the delusion that they could whip the great J. Casey to a light froth, should lose no time in making themselves known to Mr. Joe Connery, the celebrated box-fight impresario, at his office on Forty-Third Street, slightly off Broadway. Slightly off was right. And there was a column story on the sport page by the world-famous author, W. McKettrick, which was alone worth the price of admission. All told, the affair kicked up no more commotion than if, say, Charles S. Chaplin was to walk into a kindergarten.

And it wasn't long before the results begun to trickle in. But what few stragglers showed up that first day, why, they was

merely the press agents of the coming storm, as they say in the movies. No doubt before most of the coming heavyweight champs could answer the ad—for, of course, they had to show up in person—they were up against the necessity of seeing the boss for the purpose of getting time off from the boiler establishments, trucking studios, piano-moving colleges, and the like, where up to now they'd been hiding their several lights under so many bushels, so to say.

For when next morning I turn up at the building where I'm only three months in arrears for rent—well, I wish you could of seen 'em! If a movie magnate had been on the lookout for a real sure-enough mob scene, why, there it was! All he'd had to of done was come and shoot it.

Why, for a hundred feet in either direction from the entrance to the building, the sidewalk was jammed to the curb. There was ambassadors from all our best-known nationalities, from Czecho-Slovaks and Jerseyites, too, and of course including the Scandinavians. Likewise, there was representatives, as I found out later, of most every trade, art, science and profession known to man, including safe-cracking and painting on china. Most of them, as you could see at a glance, weighs in at somewhere around two hundred. But, here and there, there was visible to the eye an occasional whale who, it was safe to say, would never again see three hundred. And so, as you might say, even if there'd been only a few of 'em present, why, it would of still been quite a crowd at that.

Of course, a good share of the mob was merely innocent onlookers who was there in the usual spirit of "Now, what's comin' off?" Also there was coppers on hand to the number of half a dozen or more, and they were having a sweet time, too, on account of the prospective champs seemingly rarin' to go, and every now and then insisting on starting an elimination tournament among themselves without benefit of clergy or anything.

And there must of been somebody in the bunch that knew me. For I hadn't much sooner heaved in sight than I'm greeted with, "Here he is! That's the guy! Here's Connery!" and the like. And the next

minute I'm confronted by one of the officers of the law.

"See here, guy," he says in a rude, angry voice. "You the bird that's responsible for all this?"

The crowd had me pegged and there was no use denying it. So I didn't.

"All right," says the copper. "C'mon! Let's take a walk."

"Officer," I says politely, "these gentlemen are present in answer to an ad I put in the paper. Ain't a man got a right—"

"I'm wise to that ad stuff," butts in the guardian of the peace. "Some of these guys was tellin' me. Goin' to lick Casey, hey? A sweet chance! C'mon! Let's go!"

"But just one question, officer," I pleads. "What am I pinched for?"

"Breach of the peace, obstructin' traffic, public nuisance, disorderly conduct, resistin' an officer, abusive language, incitin' to riot and—uh—conspiracy," recites the cop.

"Oh," I says. "*Conspiracy*, eh?"

Now if that copper's name wasn't O'Reilly—well, it sure wasn't Swanson, Schmidt, Jones, Levinski or the like, either. So, improvising rapidly, and taking a chance on just how much he knows about the current champ, I goes on in a whisper:

"Listen, officer! D'ye know what this guy Casey's real name is?"

"Why," he says, astonished, "ain't it Casey?"

"Don't make me laugh," I says. "I'll tell you what it is. It's Weinberg—Abraham Weinberg, that's what it is!"

"Discharged!" says Officer O'Reilly.

And just then along came W. McKettrick, and, having with no little difficulty made our way to the office, we opened for business. Maybe we didn't get it! Why, inside of three seconds there's a scene something resembling a cross between a labor riot and a panic on the Stock Exchange; and from thence onward, me and W. McKettrick was no busier than a couple of gold diggers in a restaurant. And when we finally called it a day, I remember there was quite a debate as to whether we'd go home, to a hospital, or to Bloomingdale, which last was strongly indicated.

During the following month or so, not to bother with the details, I was at death's

widely known door forty-eight times. Mostly it was from overwork, nervous strain, and the like, incidental to weeding out the chaff from the straw, so to say, which we did by trying out the one thousand candidates—well, maybe there was a few less—against each other at a gym catering largely to the leather-pushing trade.

Other times, however, it was on account of laughing myself simple as the result of watching some of them aspirants for heavy-weight honors in the act of doing their stuff. Why, what most of them poor goofs knew about boxing, and what's more, all anybody could ever learn 'em about it, you could write on one wall of a gnat's bungalow. Ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of them would of stood the same chance with Mr. J. Casey that Noah would of had without the ark. But of course in order to find it out, we had to put 'em through their paces. So we did.

And the net result was Dudley Edwards Raymond, for which, after a terrible struggle, I managed to dig up the strikingly original ring-title of "Kid" Raymond.

It seems that on account of devoting considerably more time to baseball, football, and allied topics, than he done to a number of other subjects which the faculty foolishly considered more important, Dudley Edwards Raymond had escaped from one of these small Southern colleges after doing only two years, whereas he'd originally been sentenced to four. So then Dudley, who was a Southerner by birth, had come North looking for a job, only to find that, curiously enough, somebody else had been looking for one, too, and had beat him to it. Anyway, I know that, as a matter of fact, the young Southerner was pretty well out of luck when his eye happens to meet that ad calling for recruits for the war against Casey, and he lost no time in answering it.

And he made no mistake when he did. He was a clean-cut, more than ordinarily good-looking two-hundred-pounder, was an athlete from the ground up, and had already done quite a bit of boxing, though only in an amateur way, of course. And the first time I laid an astonished eye on him in fighting trunks, and so forth, I says to myself that here was the winner of our grand

elimination tournament—which, by the way, the newspapers and therefore the public, was following with what is known far and wide as breathless interest—and maybe I wasn't right!

Why, right from the start, just on the way he shapes up, Kid Raymond has the rest of these poor cuckoos looking like a handful of coppers up against a hundred-dollar gold piece, and he proves it by going through 'em like fire through a celluloid collar factory. Anyway, when the weeding-out process was finally completed there was nothing to it but Dudley Edwards Raymond. And in my weighty opinion, and likewise in those of W. McKettrick and several other competent newspaper critics, Kid Raymond, given time and proper handling—which was where I personally came in—stood at the least a fifty-fifty chance of spilling the limas for one J. Casey.

And now we're up against one of them deadly pauses such as in the movies they gets round by blandly throwing on the screen some such thrilling message as "A year passes," or the like. Well, as a matter of fact, that was somewheres near the length of time that had elapsed when one day the newspapers announced to a waiting world that Kid Raymond was now duly signed and sealed to mingle with one "Gunboat" Brown—so called because his well-shaped walkovers resembled nothing so much as a couple of violin cases—and that, what's more, no less than J. Casey had agreed to meet the winner.

So, not to go into all the pros, cons, and the like, which consisted entirely of the kid knocking a dozen or eighteen tough but likewise brainless battlers for a bunch of toll-calls, it goes without saying that Dudley E. Raymond had made the grade. And this Gunboat person, who had been coming to the front since about the time the Kid started his own rise to the top, was now the only obstacle left between us and—well, if we took Casey, a couple of front-row seats right on top of this man's world!

Well, the match with Gunboat Brown was about a month off, and the Kid had been in the strictest of training for a couple of weeks and was going along like Man o' War, when one day I once more chanced

to meet W. McKettrick. The spot where the crime occurred was directly in front of a movie house, which I will call the Orpheum, because, as a matter of fact, it was entitled the Lyric. Kid Raymond was with me. For a couple of days I'd been wanting to see Walter on a matter of business, and so I grabbed the opportunity without delay.

"Oh, Walter," I hails him. "Just a minute! I—er—oh, excuse me!" I winds up kind of confused. For up to then I hadn't noticed that Mr. McKettrick was busily engaged in conversation with a young lady who would of most certainly made Harrison Fisher give up in disgust and go in for painting something to which he could do justice.

So then, of course, Walter does his stuff, and it appears that the reigning sensation's name is Miss Dorothy Kent. The best I could do was say I was glad to meet her, though I seemed to remember where somebody had used that line before. As for the Kid—not a word! I looked at him to see what was the reason for this strange silence, so to say. Well, I found out.

He'd already gone down for the third time. You couldn't of saved him with fourteen pulmotors working in relays. Dudley Edwards Raymond was sunk with all on board!

I can tell you how the rest of that little episode come out in a couple of sentences. Miss Kent was merely a casual acquaintance of Mr. McKettrick's, very likely owing to the fact that there was already a future Mrs. McKettrick who wrote a mean "Advice to the Lovesick" column for Walter's paper, and so, of course, she would know exactly what to do in a case like that. And the last I saw of Dudley E. Raymond for some hours was when the doors of the Orpheum closes behind him and the charming Miss Dorothy Kent, who had had the idea of viewing the current attraction in mind when she'd happened to encounter Mr. McKettrick.

So you might say the Kid had made a quick recovery. Well, if that's what you call it.

Personally, it didn't strike me as anything of the sort. Oh, the Kid does his

stuff, I'll allow him that. But all the time it's plain to be seen that he's so far under the influence of love's young dream that, for example, he don't know whether he's working out with an unusually tough sparring partner or touring the world in the subway, so to say. Sometimes I'd find him sitting on a medicine ball, or the like, with a goofy look spread over his features and gazing far off into the dim distance. You know the way they do. Such times, why, I bet you could of stuck a pair of scissors into him an inch and it would of affected him no more than as if he was an iron dog or something.

And outside of this imitation he gives me of a Hindu Yogi training for a prize fight, the best I get from the handsome and athletic young Southerner is an earful of Miss Dorothy Kent, who, of course, the Kid loses no opportunity to meet. And in that respect I must say that, considering the frequency with which Mr. Raymond succeeds in inflicting himself on Miss Kent, why, it didn't look like Miss Dorothy was actually going to the extent of dodging around corners, and the like, to avoid him.

However, though the Kid's output on his favorite topic is enormous, all I get from him which could be strictly regarded as information, amounts to this: She—which is to say the dazzling Dorothy—belongs to one of them fine old New England families which, among one or two others known to history, has seen better days. Likewise, she is what is extensively known as a nice girl. Well, he needn't of told me that. And she is now biting a wicked lead pencil, just to get along, in the office of some broker or something, who, I sort of gather from the Kid, who no doubt got it from the nerve-thrilling Dorothy herself, belongs to the celebrated Legree family.

And that's about all. Beyond that—well, he says a lot, but it don't make sense. You know what I mean.

Anyway, that about describes the condition of the patient during the first two weeks of the disease. Then he takes a sudden turn for the worse. Or as you might say, the worst. What I mean—the Kid comes out with the information that him and some dame—seems like the name was Kent, or

something like that—has concluded to startle the natives by getting married.

"Kid," I says, "I'm simply dumbfounded! Why, I had no idea that you'd even so much as look at one of the fairish sex! Who is this Kent lady? I never heard of her."

Say—that boy could sure hurl a mean two-pound dumbbell! Only for my long and wide experience in dodging insurance agents, relatives from Corncob, Connecticut, bill collectors, and the like, I'd of been crashed for a triple.

However, the Kid says I needn't worry, because they ain't going to do anything desperate right away. What's more, he has no idea of quitting the game of fisticuffs till he can do so in the style to which no less than champions is accustomed. So that was O. K. as far as it went. Which wasn't so far.

Well, for a couple of days after Dorothy yesses him, why, the Kid is in what is known to our leading star-gazers as the Seventh Heaven. Then all of a sudden it looks like something terrible must of happened. Anyway, one day Dudley shows up at the gym looking like he'd spent the entire night gazing on the alcohol when it was wooden.

"Sweet sister!" I says with a gasp when I beheld him. "What's happened? You make the 'Wreck of the Hesperus' look like next year's Shamrock! Has she turned you down?"

He shakes his head—and that's all. I can't get another thing out of him. And it don't stop there. As the days go by the Kid continues to grow no better rapidly, and still refuses to tell what's troubling him. Only one thing was certain: Kid Raymond was all shot. He grows more and more to resemble the wrath of Moses, or something, and he took no more interest in the rapidly oncoming gymnastics with Gunboat Brown than a chronic addict to rheumatism takes in Walter Camp's dippy dozen. Didn't care a rap whether the Gunboat knocked his block off or not, so it looked. Why, in fact, I seemed to get the idea that that was exactly what the Kid hoped the Gunner *would* do! He was just that desperate about—whatever it was.

Well, it was my thought that unless something happened, and mighty quick, the young Romeo would get his wish. For with the Kid right, why, the Gunboat would of been a push-over; but with young Mr. Raymond like he most undoubtedly was—well, that was something else again, and likewise, what I'd personally call a sweet state of affairs from any angle!

Three days before the fight I went after him again, and this time I certainly rode him hard. And he came through. Maybe because he'd already made up his mind to get it off his chest. And it seems that Dudley E. Raymond has been doing a bit of flying under false colors. In a word he'd neglected to inform his future helpmate that he was by way of being a box-fighter by trade, for what reason I will leave you to guess at, but had, instead, give her to understand that he was a young business gentleman interested in cotton goods, or something. Then suddenly he'd discovered that this positively could not go on, and—what to do? What to do?

I told him what to do. "You go see her," I says, "and tell her the truth. And do it now. If she's for you, why, it 'll make no difference whether you're a box-fighter, a Congressman, or whether you're holding down one of them intellectual jobs. And if she ain't—well, now's the time to know it."

So he took my advice and went and told her the truth.

And she gave him the air.

That finished Dudley E. Raymond. If there'd been any way of side-stepping the Gunboat Brown thing, which there was not, I'd of certainly showed Maurice and Walton a few little things in the stepping line. I told W. McKettrick my troubles. He said it was a tough break. I said nobody had a thing on him when it come to sizing up situations. The fight—I'll never forget it! During the first two frames Kid Raymond was on the floor six times. The Gunner hit him with everything but the Flat-iron Building. At the close of the second, the Kid reels back to his corner. Then somebody shoves a wire for the Kid through the ropes. I read it to him. Maybe it didn't make a difference! Why, the third

chukker wasn't a minute old when the Gunner blocks the Kid's right with his chin and immediately leaves for Monte Carlo, or somewhere, while thousands of paying customers and two hundred and sixty-eight eggs who had crashed the gate wishes him a *bon voyage!* Which was very much as it should be.

As you've no doubt surmised, the wire was to the effect that Miss Kent had reconsidered and all was forgiven. And if the thing had stopped right there—but lemme tell you: me and the Kid had hardly reached the dressing room when in rushes no less than the fair Dorothy herself! No doubt she'd sweetened up one of the ushers or somebody and—anyway, there she was. And you could of easily knocked me over with the crank to the family flivver!

Well, there's a reunion that makes a frost out of the final twenty feet of any movie. And among other things Dorothy admits that she simply could not help seeing the scrap and—Dudley was wonderful! "But during the first two innings, or whatever they are," she says, "I thought—what was that message that was read to you?" she breaks off and asks point blank.

"Why, your own!" says the Kid surprised. "Didn't you know—?"

He stops and looks at me. And I don't need to be told that he thinks he's been framed. What's more, if what I see in the Kid's eyes comes true, I'm going to take a trip, and that's that! For though I've said that Dudley E. Raymond was a product of the sunny South, maybe I've omitted to state that he likewise had one of them tropical tempers which is anything but sunny at times! And I'd like to say that right there and then I would of cheerfully give five thousand dollars cash for one of them handy little trapdoors which gets our leading scenario writers out of so many embarrassing situations!

However, it looked like there was no other way out of it, and so, "That message?" I says to Miss Kent with considerable aplomb in view of the circumstances. "Why, the one you sent him, of course, saying you'd—er—reconsidered and—eh—forgiving the Kid for deceiving you, and all that."

And with that I deliberately closed one eye—the one that was away from the fiery-tempered young Kentuckian.

"Oh," she says with a smile that, among other things, might be called whimsical. "But he should have got that before! It must have been delayed."

Have you got to give her credit? You have!

When I fell for that fake message scheme, which W. McKettrick had suggested as a last resort, I told him it was for better or far worse. Though far worse was right

any way you looked at it. For win, lose, or draw, there was bound to be a comeback—except the way it finally did turn out! Well, you know how the battle with Casey come out. He never had a chance with the Kid. When the Kid and Dorothy steps off I sent her, along with the customary beautiful cut-glass offering, a card: "*To one in one thousand.*"

The bridegroom wanted to know what was the idea.

"Well," I says, "do you deny it?"

That's where I had him.

The Lady in Blue

by

Part V

Augusta Groner and Grace Colbron

Authors of "The Man with the Black Cord," "Joe Muller, Detective," etc.



CHAPTER XV.

TONY AGAIN.

"SHE gave her thirty crowns," exclaimed Mrs. Deisler, sinking exhausted and breathless into the chair Ossip pushed forward for her.

They were sitting in the big airy kitchen of the Gray House. Ossip, his injured leg still bound, was busily cutting kindlings. Mrs. Deisler had just come in, her arms full of packages.

"She gave her thirty crowns," she repeated, as impressively as her lack of breath would permit.

"You're all out of breath," remarked Ossip without any signs of excitement.

"Who gave who thirty crowns?"

The old housekeeper had poured so many bits of variegated information into his ears in the twenty-four hours since Muller's departure that the young Russian had learned to take them with considerable equanimity. They were not of much value, as a rule.

Mrs. Deisler took a fresh start. "Tony gave the old Crumpholz woman thirty crowns."

Ossip sat up now, and laid knife and wood on the table. "Who is the Crumpholz woman?"

"The old beggar who sits by the cemetery gate. I was coming home from my niece's house—and I thought I'd step in to the poor young lady's grave for a min-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly, for April 8,

ute. And Mrs. Crumpholz told me—she knows me—that she got all that money from the same young woman who was at the funeral with me.”

“When did she get the money?” said Ossip, reaching out for his hat. Mrs. Deisler laughed, a rather bitter laugh. “Oh, don’t exert that sore knee of yours for nothing. You won’t catch Tony now and I’m right glad of it. For I’ll never, never believe that she did anything wrong—never—”

“Please answer me,” insisted Ossip.

“Yes, yes, I’m telling you. And I don’t mind doing it, either, for it can only help Tony. She came to the cemetery the day she went away. June 4, it was last Friday. Crumpholz is sure of the date ’cause there was a big funeral that day, the old general—lots of people and soldiers and all that. And I think it can’t possibly hurt Tony if I tell you this. Because it isn’t so easy for a poor girl to give away a whole month’s wages. It shows she was trying to make up for whatever she did—although you can’t make me think she did anything wrong—whatever you say. But, anyway, she wouldn’t keep the money the baron paid her—and I think that’s wonderful of her.”

Ossip gave a light shrug. “At the cemetery gate you say?”

“Yes. But you ain’t going there, are you? Your knee’s real bad to-day. I don’t like the looks of it.”

“I must talk to the old woman.”

“She can’t tell you any more than she told me.”

“I’m not so sure about that. Don’t worry about me. It takes a good deal to kill me.”

Ossip was out at the door before Mrs. Deisler could enter another protest. But he had a longer walk than he thought, for the old beggar had gone to her home on the outskirts of the city, beyond the tramway lines. When Ossip finally found her, she was disinclined to talk about the money, for she seemed to fear it would be taken from her. But when the Russian showed her a ten-crown gold piece which would be hers if she told him the story, she was quite willing to do what he asked. It wasn’t much that she had to say. The

young woman who had given her the money had come out of the cemetery after all the people from the big funeral had gone—it might have been about half past six on the evening of June 4. She had stopped and pressed something into the beggar’s hand, a tiny packet wrapped in a torn piece of newspaper.

“Pray for two unhappy souls in Purgatory,” she had whispered. Then she walked on rapidly. It was some few minutes before the old beggar had been able to examine the packet, for others had stopped to talk to her. When she finally unwrapped it she was aghast at the sum. She imagined it must have been a mistake, and kept the money wrapped up in a safe place. She thought likely the young woman might return for it.

“But she didn’t come. I think she must have gone away.”

“Did she have any luggage, a valise or the like with her?”

“No. But she had a bag hanging at her waist, a little bag like people wear when they travel—on a strap.”

“Could you let me have the bit of paper the money was wrapped in?”

The old woman nodded and limped over to a chest of drawers. She took out a tiny package, three ten-crown gold pieces in a bit of newspaper. It was a torn piece of the *Linz Gazette*. Ossip took it and handed the beggar the extra ten-crown piece, thereby calling down blessings on his head.

Then the lad returned to the Gray House, and with considerable difficulty elicited from the unwilling Mrs. Deisler a description of Tony’s simple traveling dress and the fact that when the young girl left the house she carried a light-brown leather shawl-roll, and a black valise. The house-keeper seemed to feel that she was the only bulwark between the absent Tony and a world of enemies. Ossip, as the immediate enemy on the spot, came in for her active hatred.

“And now tell me exactly what Tony herself looks like,” he asked finally.

The old woman felt like making a face at him.

“She’s mighty pretty,” she grumbled; “not too tall and not too short—nice and

round—but not fat—and has a pretty fair skin."

"Hair and eyes?"

"Brown."

"When did she leave the house on June 4?"

Mrs. Deisler thought it over. "A little before six," she said finally.

"Can you tell me anything about her—anything unusual that people would remember?"

Mrs. Deisler set the pan she was holding onto the stove with a rattle that expressed something of her feelings of the moment. With both hands at her hips she turned and faced the young Russian.

"Oh, yes, you'd like it if I could tell you that she had a club foot or carrotty red hair, or only one eye, or something so's you could spot her anywhere, wouldn't you? But, thank goodness, there's lots of pretty girls everywhere, and what I've said about Tony might suit any one of them. So I'm not scared as to what you can do to harm Tony. I'm not helping you to catch her and haul her up to court and make her unhappy, not I!" She turned to the stove and stirred angrily in the pan.

"Now don't be angry at me," said Ossip gently. "I'm only doing my duty. And there's been a warrant, with full description, out against this Tony for the past two days. If they do get her, it won't be altogether my fault—or my credit. So you see, you needn't turn your back on me like that."

"I can't abide these snoopers—they're up to no good, believe me—snooping round and interfering with decent people. They can't be good men that do that sort of work."

Ossip sighed. "There's one of them is the best man that ever lived—you may take my word on that."

Ossip sent Buchner to the police station with a letter for Commissioner Sennfeld. An hour later many house walls and fences bore a placard asking that whoever took charge of a light-brown shawl-roll and a black valise during the hour between five thirty and six thirty on the afternoon of June 4—said articles being the property of a young woman whose description was appended—should come at once to police

headquarters. The evening paper bore the same notice.

The midday meal in the Gray House was eaten in a strained silence on the part of Mrs. Deisler, and considerably suppressed amusement on the part of Ossip. To the latter's great surprise, Franz Moser dropped in shortly after dinner.

"I thought you were at the seminary this time of day," said the Russian, pushing forward a chair for his guest.

"I should be. But I suddenly remembered something which I think I ought to tell you."

"Is it so important?"

"I don't know. But Mr. Muller said that anything which had a bearing on this case might be important. So when I remembered this incident I came at once." Ossip nodded, and the student continued: "I remember passing the garden gate here a few days before—the murder—and hearing Miss Lehman talking in the garden with some one—I could not see whom, but with some one with whom she seemed to be on a footing for intimacy, for this person called her 'Elise.'"

"H-m! That is interesting. Was it a man?"

"No. It was a woman's voice."

"What did you hear?"

"Just a few sentences. Miss Lehman—I know it was she, for I had heard her voice before—said, 'Then you can go away if you want to.' And the other woman answered, 'Oh, Elise—all I want is to be with my two dear ones again.'" Moser rose and took up his hat.

"That was all. But I thought you ought to know."

"Thank you; it may mean a good deal."

An hour or so later a message came from police headquarters, asking Ossip to call on Commissioner Sennfeld.

The commissioner wanted to know Muller's address in Venice.

"Enclose the letter in an envelope addressed to Signor Grunwald, Proprietor Hotel d'Italie. The same for telegrams," answered Ossip.

"Have you important news to send him, sir?"

"Yes. The person—it was a woman—who

took care of Tony's hand baggage that evening has been here. And she gave us information that may be of value."

"Oh—"

"The woman keeps a milk shop and bakery in a side street not far from the cemetery. Tony came in about six and asked her to keep the things. She said she wanted to go to the cemetery, to visit a grave. She returned about eight, took a glass of milk and a roll, saying she was leaving on an evening train. Mrs. Kerner, the woman of the shop, asked her where she was going. Tony's answer was evasive. She said merely, 'It will be an uncomfortable journey. I must spend nine hours without a break on the train on a hot night like this.' She looked very tired, or even worried, when she returned from the cemetery, the woman said.

"You'll write Mr. Muller that, sir?" asked Ossip. "Then I need tell him only my own news?"

"May I know what that is?"

"Only that Tony gave the old beggar woman who sits by the cemetery gate thirty crowns the day she left town—a big sum for a supposed servant to give away. And Mr. Franz Moser tells me that he heard Miss Lehman talking to some one in the garden—some woman whom he could not see—and this woman called her Elise and seemed to be on terms of considerable intimacy with her. No woman came to the Gray House while Miss Lehman lived there except a dressmaker who came twice for a fitting. It could not have been Mrs. Deisler, therefore—it must have been Tony, the 'maid.'"

"Therefore this poor girl must necessarily have played a part all the time she was in the Gray House?" said Sennfeld with a touch of irritation. "Why are you all hounding this woman—and taking for granted that she has more to do with the crime than—I am willing to assert, for instance?"

"She has lied about everything—then why not about her relations to Elise Lehman?"

"You're hard and cruel—for so young a man. Can't you imagine that necessity would drive her to many things quite for-

eign to her own nature. I tell you, young sir, that if you had met this woman you'd be willing to give her the benefit of the doubt all along the line."

"That is for Mr. Muller to judge. Will you tell him what I have told you, sir?"

"I wish I could tell him something more definite as to what train she took and in which direction she went."

"Surely you've thought that out—" Ossip stopped short as he saw the flash in Sennfeld's eyes. "I—I didn't mean to be presuming, sir—"

"It's all right, my lad. Muller calls you his 'right hand,' so I shouldn't be offended if you do remind me of my duty—as he has done several times," said the commissioner with a good-natured laugh. "But as a matter of fact, I have reasoned it out somewhat, and I might as well tell you the results. Tony was in the bakery at eight o'clock. She could not have reached the station for any train earlier than eight thirty. Now there is a train that leaves for Vienna at eight fifty and reaches its destination—without change—at five fifty next morning, exactly nine hours later."

"Are there any other night trains?"

"One leaves at ten forty-three, but lands nine hours later—after a change at a junction, in a little Tyrolean town. This girl was no peasant. It's far more likely that she belongs in Vienna, and has returned there. She could not have gone to Munich, as she said, for she could not have reached Munich in nine hours from here, and not without several changes, by any night train. I think it is safe to assume that Tony went to Vienna. I have notified headquarters there, as I shall tell Mr. Muller."

The commissioner rose and held out his hand to Ossip. The lad took it with a deep flush of gratitude at the comradely tone of the official's words. He felt that he was indeed coming back to an honorable place in the world that had cast him off. And again the young Russian's soul melted in a silent prayer of gratitude to the man to whom he owed it all.

As soon as he returned to the Gray House Ossip sat down to study the bit of paper Tony had wrapped around the money she gave the beggar. It was a piece of the Linz

Gazette of June 2. "It is mere chance, or did she deliberately buy that paper? Her assertion that Linz was her home has proved false."

Then suddenly Ossip remembered that Mrs. Deisler took the Linz *Gazette* and stacked up the papers on her living room table. Tony might have taken a paper from the pile at random, or might have had some interest in the paper because she had regular access to it. He studied his bit carefully. On one side was half of the column of "Personals."

Ossip read them word for word. Suddenly he started, a flash of intuition widened his eyes and sent the blood to his head. It was an advertisement headed "Enns Valley," and it read:

Don't worry; am quite calm; climbed the Tamischpeak yesterday; awaiting you anxiously; no sense in staying on, too dangerous; bit of good news; M. performed Maria Stiegen this week.

Ossip studied the lines again and again, then went over to the table and took down the papers of the last two weeks. He had hard work to suppress an exclamation when he found another "Personal" headed, "Enns Valley" in the copy of May 30. This one read:

Arrangement stands; then we can be sure of the situation; let me hear from you.

And Ossip found one more Enns Valley "Personal." This one, on June 3, was quite short:

Day after to-morrow, early morning; don't come for me.

"Day after to-morrow?" murmured Ossip. "That was June 5. This girl arrived in Vienna on the morning of June 5 and she was communicating through this paper with a man—it must have been a man. Women don't usually climb the Tamischpeak—a man who is a mountain climber, and has some connection with Vienna. For there is a well-known church, 'Maria Stiegen,' in Vienna. We are getting warmer and warmer. Mr. Muller can't help finding them both now." The young Russian wrote his employer a long letter, pasting in the three "Personals." He inclosed a letter from Ber-

lin, which arrived while he was writing his own. Then he himself took the night train for Linz.

CHAPTER XVI.

MULLER GOES TO VENICE.

JOSEPH MULLER sat by the car window, looking out on the landscape that sped past the moving train. His lips moved softly. "I shall find what I seek—down there by the southern sea." He paused with a start and sat up straight, but his thoughts ran on, somewhat amused just now. "I wouldn't dare let any one know how much I trust these intuitions. It would injure my reputation. We poor mortals think we have to be so intensely 'practical.' We hate to acknowledge that all our best conscious brain effort is not worth half as much as one flash of this mysterious something we call intuition, the something that whispers to us from outside of ourselves. Facts are all very well in their way, but—by the way, there is some fact connected with the name of Volkner which is trying to edge itself into my memory. What is it? Yes, it's something connected with that forgery case I laid over—we'll look into that later."

At the next station Muller sent off a dispatch to police headquarters in Vienna, then put everything else out of his mind except the case on which he was now engaged.

That is, he tried to. But in spite of the iron discipline his trained will exerted over body and brain, one charming, recent memory would persist in pushing to the foreground the memory of a rich-toned voice, the memory of an unusual personality. "If I were younger," thought Muller with a smile and a half sigh, "I might envy Hubert Lohr his wife."

Venice; sunshine, colors, joyous noise, a press of eager gondoliers, a swift passing over green waters between peering old houses—

Signor Grunwald, genial host of the Hotel d'Italie, doffed his famous black velvet cap, one of the sights of Venice, and greeted Muller with enthusiasm.

"Welcome, welcome," he exclaimed aloud, then whispered, as he helped his guest up the steps: "What is it this time, embezzlement or murder?"

"Murder, friend Grunwald," replied Muller. "But I do not yet know who the murderer is or what his motive?"

"You will know—you will," said Grunwald confidently.

He himself escorted Muller to the comfortable room that had been his on former visits. "You'll find it out soon," he repeated as he threw open the windows.

"How cozy it looks here," said Muller, glancing about the room. "I feel so at home. No, friend, I'm growing old," he continued with a touch of sadness. "No man can expect to do at sixty what he did at forty. My brain and body alike are losing their elasticity."

"You needn't worry," exclaimed Grunwald. "I hear wonderful things of some of your later exploits. By the way, do you still insist on your one hundred convicted murderers before you retire?"

Muller smiled sadly. "I made the vow in an evil hour for me, an hour when society had cast me out for a deed that any man with blood in his veins or a sense of honor would have committed. My life had gone to pieces, but I promised myself that I would serve society in spite of its treatment of me. But somehow, as the years go by, I begin to understand that the average human being, no matter what he may do, is to be pitied, not hated."

Grunwald laughed merrily. "Yes, I've heard stories about that, too. That last murder case; the husband who killed his wife—when you caught him and no one else could, you gave him your own revolver."

"Why not? The woman was a beast. The poor man had suffered enough. I wanted to spare him disgrace."

"And the woman you took into your house—the thief whom you engaged as housekeeper when she had finished her prison term—how are you getting along with her?"

Muller's gravity relaxed in a smile. "I never was more comfortable, never was better served, nor more honestly. I never lock up anything now. Once in a while

I do remember to close my safe, but that's all. When I took Katie from prison I said to her: 'If I miss a single piece of paper or a single lead pencil, you'll leave my house at once. And, if you should take anything of value and try to get away with it, you know that it would only be a few days, or at most, a few weeks, before you'd be behind prison bars again.' I was more sure of myself in those days. But it helped, believe me. Katie's been with me for eleven years; and I never had a better servant."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Grunwald. "I wish I were a detective and could get my servants out of the prisons! Then I might have some peace and comfort. Have you been doing any more of that sort of thing?"

Muller opened his bag and took out some papers, which he slipped in his pocket. Then he turned to his host. "If you don't give me away I'll tell you that I have had a chance to save a human life and to save a human soul. I'm afraid I—eh—shall we say, *evaded* the law a little in doing it? For I took under my care a young lad who had killed his mother's defamer, after he had escaped from prison. And, believe me, I did well. Ossip Jewleff has talents along my own line which are well worth cultivating. He is now a capable assistant and will prove a worthy successor. Are there any letters for me, Grunwald?"

"Nothing yet," said the hotelkeeper. "I've been watching the mail like an impatient lover ever since I heard you were coming. But I'll get it to you whenever it comes. What are you going to do now?"

"My gondolier and a native secret service man are waiting for me outside. I'm going over to the Lido."

"Just like a regular tourist? Your man's over there, is he? Poor chap!"

"Yes," said Muller. "I do feel sorry for him, if he is my man."

"Hello—you don't even know it yourself?"

"No. I've never known so little, after finding out so much, as I do about this case."

"Is the case of long standing?"

"It happened on the 29th of May, an apparent suicide which, however, is a murder. And to-day is the 9th of June."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Grunwald. "That's not two weeks. Most detectives would take a month on a matter like that and then pride themselves on their cleverness."

"I don't," said Muller, "and I know I'm growing old."

When they landed on the Lido Muller told his companion, the secret service man whom the Italian police had put at his disposal, to wait near the wharf while he himself went to the Pension Mantini. He walked through the garden and was just about to touch the bell at the door when he heard voices coming from behind a clump of bushes that concealed the entrance to the kitchen.

"Don't be so mad about it," said a man laughingly, and an angry woman's voice answered: "Why shouldn't I be mad when I get fired for no reason at all? 'Tisn't true that I went through his desk. I never touched a thing in his old room. But there's no pleasing this Mr. Volkner of late. He's scared of anybody."

A door slammed somewhere and Muller thought to himself that things might be easier than he imagined. An angry discharged servant is a valuable ally. He rang the bell and the door was opened by a trim little maid with snapping black eyes. Muller inquired whether the Marchesa Mantini was at home.

"No, sir," answered the girl. Her irritation of a moment back still sounded through her voice.

"That doesn't matter," said Muller kindly. "You may be able to give me the information I need. You belong to the household, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. I belong to it still," she snapped.

Muller smiled at the sharpness of her tone and laid a few silver pieces in her hand. The anger faded from her black eyes and she smiled at him most engagingly. "What would you like to know, sir?"

Muller sat down in the comfortable chair she pushed forward to him and began: "I want your promise of discretion first of all."

"Oh, of course, sir."

"Very well, then. How long has Mr. Volkner lived here?"

"Oh, it's him you're interested in, is it?" asked the girl.

"If you please, my dear, it's up to me to ask questions," said Muller very definitely.

The girl blushed and answered quietly:

"Mr. Volkner has been here about three weeks. I can tell you the exact date, sir, if I look at my book. I had charge of his room—until to-day," she added with a snap.

"Go fetch the book," said Muller calmly, paying no attention to her irritation.

She returned shortly with a big notebook.

"He arrived on May 12. He's got something the matter with his lungs, I think. Anyway, he looks awful sick and he coughs badly."

"Indeed! And has Mr. Volkner been here right along since the 12th of May?"

The girl started, but did not answer for a moment. She knew that during this time Richard Volkner had been away for a few days. But the Marchesa had cautioned her not to say a word about it to any of the other boarders. They were to think that Mr. Volkner was ill and had stayed in bed those days.

Louisa had not been informed as to whether there was any important reason for this secrecy or whether it was merely a whim of the young man. She took for granted it was the last. And besides she'd been given five lira to talk, and she intended to talk. She was glad to play some trick on the suspicious young gentleman who wouldn't believe a decent girl's word.

She looked through her book, put her fingers in several pages and then said, low and cautiously: "There was no work to be done in his room from the 26th to the 31st of May. He was away those days. He may have been just over in Venice."

Muller's faded cheeks flushed slightly. "Just over in Venice, you think? But you're not sure that he might not have gone further away than just Venice?"

Louisa shrugged her pretty shoulders. "He took a little valise with him and an extra overcoat. It looked to me as if he was going further this time."

"Did Mr. Volkner go over to Venice often?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He stayed out over night a couple of times."

"May I see your book myself? It's a rather important matter and I must be absolutely sure. I want to see myself what you have written."

Louisa laid the book in front of him and pointed to various places.

"Mr. Volkner has room No. 3," she said, "and I take charge of it. Any day when I don't have to make the bed and fix the room I write down a naught. Mr. Volkner always had his breakfast in his room. See, I've marked a '1' here—that means that I took the tray up. It's for the room service charge. You see here there's no '1' for the 27th of May. That means he didn't have any breakfast that day. He'd left the night before. I took his overcoat and his bag down to the gondola right after supper and he told me that I mustn't tell any one in the house that he was going away. If anybody asked I must say he was ill and in bed. He went off an hour later, as soon as it was dark."

"And you don't know why he went away, or why there was such secrecy about it?"

"No, sir. I only know that he got two telegrams, one right after the other, that day. I thought maybe some one sent for him."

Muller studied the book carefully. "Then he was away from this house from the evening of the 26th of May until—but you didn't bring him any breakfast on the 1st of June, either, and you didn't fix his room. You said he came back on the 31st."

"Yes, sir, he did. He came home late on the evening of the 31st, but he felt very ill. He told me not to wake him up next morning, that he wanted to sleep. It was nearly noon when he rang for me, and he looked miserable and only wanted a little tea and soup. He didn't come down till that evening, and he looked so miserable that everybody believed he'd been ill. There's one lady here, Mrs. Lechner, who knows Mr. Volkner's mother. She got so scared the way he looked that she wanted to write his mother. That's the first time I ever saw Mr. Volkner impolite to a lady. He was almost impolite to Mrs. Lechner—"

Louisa paused and tilted her head a bit as if listening.

"What's the matter?" asked Muller.

"They're coming downstairs. Mr. Volkner and his sister. What shall I—"

"Just keep quiet, my dear, and pretend you don't know anything about me. Pay no attention to me."

Louisa took up a feather duster and began vigorously dusting the ornaments on the table. Muller took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow just as the young couple passed. His face was completely hidden by the movement. When they had gone he turned to the girl again.

"That young lady is Mr. Volkner's sister?" he asked.

Louisa nodded. "She's only been here three days. Her name is Mrs. von Widener."

"Thank you, my dear. I'll follow them."

Louisa looked after him as he strolled away. She got out the money and looked at it, and smiled a contented smile in which was mingled a touch of malice.

The couple whom Muller was following walked along through the main street that crosses the island. There were so many people strolling about that Muller could follow without any fear of discovery. He was so near them at times that he could hear snatches of what they were saying. The young lady was enthusiastic about some theatrical performance she had seen the day before, but Volkner only grumbled a few words now and then. He looked pale and ill and decidedly depressed. They parted at the entrance to the bathing establishment, and Muller heard them planning a walk to Malamocco after the bath and then a supper on the terrace of the concert garden.

It was the pretty young matron who was the moving spirit in all this. Her brother was not interested in anything. She held his hand and looked at him keenly. "I don't like the way you look at all, Richard. You're so nervous and yet so depressed. Do you feel worse? Do you think you'd better take a sea bath rather than sit somewhere quietly in the sunshine?"

He laughed harshly. "Yes, I see myself sitting quietly! That's about the one thing I can't do now. I much prefer to go into the water—which is not intended for a

joke." He nodded to her quickly before she could say any more and slipped through the entrance of the men's bath. Muller looked around and found his Italian comrade right behind him.

"Are those the people you're following?" asked the secret service man in a low tone.

"Yes. Or rather, the man."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going in bathing."

"Good gracious! Do I have to come, too?" asked the Italian with a smile.

Muller shook his head. "No, you can stay on dry land. Let's follow my man now. It might be a good idea to get the number of his cabin."

Muller stood in front of the cashier's window immediately behind Volkner. The latter asked for his 'usual' number. Muller took a check, and he and his companion followed the young man down the hall. The attendant who came to meet them greeted Volkner and opened the door of room No. 13. Muller got No. 20, and told his companion to wait outside. He undressed quickly and waited at the head of the steps leading to the water until Volkner should come.

Finally he saw the young man coming down the hall between the dressing rooms. In his scanty black Jersey suit, his extreme thinness, contrasting with his well-knit, broad-shouldered frame, was far more noticeable than in his street clothes.

"This man is terribly run down," thought Muller; "it can't be just his wound and the subsequent illness. Can it be—mental trouble, too? Poor chap! I shall really be very sorry if you are the man I'm after."

And yet as the detective followed Volkner down the steps into the ocean he said to himself rather sadly: "I'm terribly afraid this is the man I want. It would have been too strange a coincidence. He was away from the 26th to the 31st, and since then he has been upset and nervous."

Muller dived into the waves that rose up to meet him. When he came up again Volkner was just ahead of him, shaking the water off his hair and breathing quickly as if his lungs still troubled him. He looked around as he heard a friendly voice saying, "Isn't the water delightful here?"

Volkner nodded to the kindly faced, elderly man opposite him, for the free masonry of sea bathing permits what the more formal life on land would not allow. They clung side by side to the rope while Volkner explained that he had just been seriously ill and was not allowed to swim yet, although the daily dip in the ocean did him a world of good. His new friend introduced himself as Mr. Muller from Vienna, dealer in antique weapons and armor. He said that he, too, didn't care very much for swimming, because he so seldom had the opportunity for sea bathing that he was getting rather rusty at the art. He would dart off with a few swift strokes now and then, but returned at once to his young compatriot. By the time they climbed out of the water they were such good friends that Volkner himself invited Muller to spend the rest of the evening with him and with his sister. Muller had cleverly maneuvered to bring about this invitation.

"It's hard to enjoy oneself alone," said the young man with a pleasant smile, "and to tell you the truth I'm very glad to have some one else with us. My poor sister is here only for a few days, too, and I know I'm boring her to death with my nervousness and my melancholy. There's been too much on my mind of late, and I know I'm wretched company. So I'd be very glad if you will have supper with us and listen to the music for a while before you return to Venice. Won't you go for a little walk with us now to warm up after the bath?"

Volkner spoke with all the easy charm of an amiable man of the world. But even while he was talking his thoughts were elsewhere.

Muller noticed it and rather regretted it. For the veteran detective's kind heart was getting the better of him again, and he confessed to himself that if the thoughts of this attractive young man were in Salzburg, as his own were, that same heart would once more come into conflict with his duty. "Oh, dear!" he sighed to himself. "I could almost wish it had been 'Goldie Boy.' He was a tougher sort."

Even before Mrs. von Widener joined them Muller gleaned the information that part of Volkner's nervousness was due to

the non-appearance of a letter for which he was waiting. A messenger from the Pension met him outside the bathing establishment and told him that there was no mail for him in the afternoon delivery. Volkner was quite upset at this.

As they walked along the shore he would either hang back or else pace beside them, scarcely uttering a word. He evidently wanted to be left alone.

Milla von Widener watched him, anxious and embarrassed. She apologized to their new friend. "I'm afraid you'll find us rather stupid company," she said when Volkner had fallen some steps behind them. "My brother is usually the gayest possible sort, and a great favorite everywhere. But he has been very ill and it seems to have changed him completely. Sometimes I think his mind must have suffered as well as his body."

"It looks to me as if he were worrying about something," replied Muller sympathetically. "Couldn't you find out what the trouble is? It may be quite easy to help him if you only knew."

Milla sighed deeply. "Ah, yes, if I only knew what the trouble was! But Richard won't give me the slightest intimation. Oh, how much easier life would be if we only could and would trust those near to us."

Muller exerted himself to the utmost in his desire to please these new friends and to win their confidence. He was so interesting that even Volkner began to join in the conversation here and there, and would occasionally laugh heartily at some sally. When the first stars appeared on the blue-black sky above them and the fresh evening breeze came up from over the water, the three returned to the concert garden the best of friends.

"We have some little time yet before supper," said Milla von Widener, "so if you don't mind I'll run home and scribble off a couple of letters. I'll get my coat, too, and I'll send or bring something for you, Richard. You'll keep him indoors, won't you, Mr. Muller? Don't let him even go out on the terrace until he gets his overcoat." She walked quickly off down the broad street, and the two men went into the big hall, which was now almost empty.

The Italian secret service man strolled in a moment or two later and sat down a little distance away.

"Here's a nice, comfortable table, Mr. Volkner, and not a bit of a draft anywhere," said Muller cheerily, taking the young man's arm and leading him to the corner near the big window. His comrade of the police remained standing, talking to a waiter, until the others were seated. Then he chose his own table and settled down to a bottle of wine and a big black cigar.

Muller ordered Chianti for himself and tea for Volkner.

"Make it hot," said the latter to the waiter who took the order. He shivered as he settled back in his chair.

"Are you chilly?" said Muller.

"I get shivery so often now," answered Volkner. "Those sudden shivers, they're so unpleasant."

"Yes, I know. I had a feeling like that just the other day," said Muller, looking keenly at the young man's face. He had placed the chairs so that the light fell full on Volkner.

He paused for a moment, and Volkner, evidently feeling that some remark was demanded of him, inquired politely: "What made you shiver?"

As he spoke his eyes followed two fine looking women who passed them, followed with but very mild interest.

Muller spoke slow and calmly. "I held a dagger in my hand, the blade of which was dulled with fresh blood stains."

"That was interesting. I suppose you do meet queer things in your business. Did you just happen in on a quarrel? They use that romantic weapon in this country more than they do in our home."

Volkner had spoken with the same absent-minded calmness, while his eyes still followed the women. But his thoughts were neither with them or with the words his companion had just uttered.

Muller had held his breath for a moment or two, now he let it out with a faint sigh of relief. He had made the first test and Volkner had passed it well. No, this was not the man who but a few days before had thrown the blood-stained dagger away in horror.

It could not be. For Richard Volkner was so utterly run down, so utterly unnerved that the sudden scream of a sea gull made him start and a child running too near the water had turned him ghastly pale. No man whose nerves were so little under control could have heard Muller's words so calmly, if these same words had awakened in his mind the memory of the hideous hour in the Gray House.

Muller was too experienced a psychologist not to realize he had followed a false trail. In his own preoccupation with the one important bit of evidence against Volkner, his secret absence from the Pension on the critical day, the old detective had overlooked one point—and he blushed as he remembered that now. All his own discoveries in the Gray House had shown him that it was not a premeditated murder, but a hasty act of violence. When Volkner left the Lido—if he *had* gone to Salzburg to see Elise Lehman, he had no reason whatsoever for keeping his departure a secret. His departure, his absence and the secrecy connected with it—as well as his nervousness—must have some other cause.

Muller felt convinced of this. But he would not let go this trail until he had made one or two more tests. For even if Volkner were not the man he was after, he might give him valuable information.

But his own attention was diverted just now by the appearance of an old man with a cap of the Hotel d'Italie. The man came in the hall, looked around and then came toward Muller. "Oh, Mr. Muller," he exclaimed, "I've been looking for you for nearly two hours. Mr. Grunwald sends this telegram and these two letters. They came about an hour after you'd left."

Muller thanked the old man whom he knew well from former visits, gave him money and told him that if anything more should come it was to be left at the hotel until his return. He took a letter opener from his pocket and cut the envelope rather hastily. Volkner looked at him smiling.

"So you're nervous, too. I thought you were one of the calm, poised sort who never knew what it was to be excited. I've been envying you your steady nerves all the afternoon."

"Even my nerves are not what they used to be," replied Muller with a light sigh. "Will you pardon me if I glance over this mail? I fancy it is important."

Volkner nodded and took up a newspaper.

Muller opened the telegram first, read it quickly and nodded as if content. "Ossip is very intelligent," he thought as he slipped the paper into his pocket. The message was dated that morning from Linz and it read:

Have handwriting of advertiser of June 2.
Advertisement was give in in Amstetten.

JEWLEFF.

Muller looked at the two letters in deep thought for a few moments before he opened them. He took up the commissioner's letter first, because he thought it likely that what Ossip had to say was more important, and he wanted to leave that for the last. Also, Sennfeld's letter was official.

Muller opened it and read it attentively, pausing now and then as if to think. He was evidently greatly interested in what the commissioner had to say. Then he took up his young assistant's letter.

Ossip repeated what Sennfeld had said, also Moser's story of the conversation in the garden between Elise Lehman and some other woman with whom she was evidently on terms of intimacy. Then Ossip told the story of his visit to the old beggar and its scanty result. But there was one thing that he had to say of which the commissioner had evidently known nothing. For the very good reason that Ossip had not told him. And it was this very point that interested Muller more than anything else in the letter.

In talking to Ossip about Tony, Mrs. Deisler had said one day that it was queer how even the most intelligent women were vain. When Ossip asked for an explanation the housekeeper told how Tony had had her face wrapped up in a cloth on account of a bad toothache on the day when Baron Wallroth and Professor Thorn had come to the house. But when the good-looking professor sent for her to come upstairs, Tony took off the disfiguring bandage.

Ossip's letter went on to say:

I asked Mrs. Deisler how long Tony had worn the cloth and also when the telegram had arrived announcing that the men were

coming. It seems that the telegram arrived about eleven o'clock in the morning. Tony's toothache came on right after lunch, about twelve, and the gentlemen came to the Gray House about three o'clock. It was about half past three when the baron drove away, and Tony took off her bandage when she went upstairs to see Professor Thorn. It looks to me as if Tony had pretended this toothache so that she might hide her face from Baron Wallroth. But she did not mind showing it to Professor Thorn. Evidently he did not know her. But if the baron did know her and she did not want him to recognize her—why did she linger on in the Gray House? Why did she run the risk of having him recognize her?

I found one of these "Personals" in the piece of paper in which Tony had wrapped the money she gave the beggar. It was the *Linz Gazette* of the 31st of May. The other two "Personals" were in the same paper in the copy of June 2 and 3. There was no other similar "Personal" before the 31st of May or after the 3rd of June. I do not think I have missed anything and I hope I have been able to serve you usefully. I am going to Linz to-night in the hope of finding out who put that "Personal" in the paper.

Your deeply grateful,

OSSIP.

Salzburg, June 8.

Then Muller opened the letter which Ossip had inclosed in his. It was from Berlin from Walter Thorn. He wrote:

My surmise as to the person we are seeking has proved quite incorrect. As I fear you noticed, I did have some one in mind, a man whom I knew to have been a lover of the Lehman girl at one time and whose passionate nature might have made such a deed comprehensible. But I find now that he spent those days here going about his business in the usual way, perfectly calm. I hope sincerely that I have not sent you off on any false trail, for I realize now that not every man is a detective.

One thing I do not regret, and that is that I have gradually, little by little, let my cousin see the truth about Elise, her character and the life she led. He is much calmer now, and is evidently glad that he escaped this marriage. He tells me that Hubert Lohr, Elise's stepbrother, warned him several times about her, warned him insistently, although he would not say anything definite. But he evidently did not approve of the marriage. I am returning to Vienna with Wallroth.

Muller studied the letter for a few moments, then folded it and put it in his pocket with the others. Then he rose and to Volkner's great astonishment he walked

over to the man who sat at the table near them and spoke to him. They shook hands and the man at the table called up the waiter, paid his bill and strolled out of the hall.

When Muller returned to his table Volkner looked at him with particular interest. "Was that man a friend of yours? I didn't notice that you greeted him."

"I didn't," said Muller, "but I told him now that I no longer needed him, that he could take my gondola and go back to the city."

"Need him? What would you need him for?" asked Volkner with youthful curiosity. But he did not wait for the answer, for there was another interruption. Louisa, the maid from the Pension, came up to the table and handed Volkner a letter and his overcoat.

"The lady sends these," she said, "and she'll be here herself in less than half an hour." Volkner snatched the letter hastily with a murmured thanks to the girl. He looked up with an instant's surprise at her sudden flush and start when she saw Muller. But a moment later he had forgotten everything and was immersed in the letter he held in his trembling hands.

The girl stared at Muller, who looked at her as if he had never seen her before. But when he realized that Volkner was completely absorbed he motioned to her to go away. Then an exclamation across the table drew his attention to his companion again.

Volkner had dropped the letter in his lap, his hands were clasped and he looked up almost as if praying. "Oh, thank God, thank God!" he murmured. Then he straightened up, stretched his young frame and the color flooded his pale cheeks. He looked ten years younger. His eyes met Muller's, and the latter smiled in deep sympathy.

"You've had good news?" he said.

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Volkner. "The best of all news. I can now live like a human being—not trembling in terror of what the next moment might bring—in terror of—" He paused, then shook his head. "No, I can't talk about it now, not even to my sister. You won't mention to her—"

I mean the effect this letter had on me. Can I depend on you, Mr. Muller?"

"Most people find they can depend on me," said Muller. "And, besides, I'm leaving Venice to-morrow morning and I have my head full of my own affairs, so that you need not fear any indiscretion on my part. But there is something I must say to you before Mrs. von Widener's return, and I, too, must ask for your discretion. Mr. Volkner, I have deceived you as to my person. I am not a dealer in antique, but a detective—and there has been no element of chance in our meeting to-day."

Volkner sat quietly. But his face was ghastly pale despite a strong effort to control it. His hand tightened on the edge of the table until the skin shone white over the knuckles.

Muller's keen, gray eyes rested on the young man's face. "You know Elise Lehman?" he asked suddenly.

This shot produced a wholly unexpected effect. The color flushed back into Volkner's cheeks as a sigh of deep relief passed his lips. The tenseness of his whole attitude changed to an expression of complete surprise.

"Why, yes—I knew her."

"Exactly. *Knew* her—then you've heard?"

"Of her suicide? Yes, it upset me, naturally."

"I can understand that. You were once—on terms of intimacy with her."

"How did you know? You say you are a detective?"

"I am a detective, commissioned by Baron Wallroth to discover the truth of certain peculiar circumstances connected with Miss Lehman's death."

"That's interesting," said Volkner, leaning forward eagerly. "Did—did Wallroth send you to me? I should think he had had quite enough of what I can tell him about her—the telling cost me dear. Oh, I beg your pardon, you may not know—"

"Of your duel with Baron Wallroth? Yes, I do know that," replied Muller calmly. To himself he said, "I am following a false trail. This man is absolutely innocent. He knows nothing whatever about the killing." Then he continued aloud:

"No, the baron did not send me to you. The conduct of the investigation is entirely in my own hands."

"But what is there to investigate about a suicide?"

"That is what I am to find out. Would you mind answering me a few questions?"

Volkner nodded with a light shrug and a half laugh. "If they're not too personal."

"No, I am not concerned with your relations with Miss Lehman. But you may be able to tell me something about her friends, male and female. There's a girl for instance, who wrote to her during May and mentioned you, saying that you were here."

"Oh, yes. I know who that was," said Volkner immediately. "Her name is Rita Egghart. She's a little actress who was engaged at the same theater in Vienna with Elise Lehman. She was in Venice for a few days in May. I met her on the street and talked to her."

Muller took down the name and address, then he said: "Do you know a man she called 'Goldie Boy' and 'Honeybunch'?"

Volkner flushed and gave an embarrassed laugh. "She called me 'Honeybunch,' too. The other one must have been after my time."

"Yes, he was the man in possession when she became engaged to the baron. I've met him."

"What sort of a person was he?" asked Volkner.

"Sort of a traveling salesman, I think. No great mental light. Husky young animal."

"That was mainly what Elise was after—that and money," said Volkner a trifle bitterly.

"Don't be unjust." Muller's tone was grave. "Did you or any of the other of them—except possibly Baron Wallroth, ask anything of this girl, but that she should amuse you with her gayety and charm you with her beauty? You never asked much about the brain that was inside that beautiful head or the heart that beat in her shapely body." Volkner's eyes drooped and his cheeks flushed.

Muller continued in a more kindly tone: "But all this is beside the point. Can

you tell me of any other woman with whom Elise Lehman was on terms of intimacy? I am thinking now of a very pretty, highly intelligent young person whose first name is probably Tony and whose last name begins with K."

"Why, of course," said Volkner eagerly, his eyes brightening. "That's a former fellow player of hers and now her sister-in-law, a charming woman, indeed! I don't mind telling you that I tried my best to win *her* favor first—but Tony wasn't that kind. She took life seriously—and—and she turned me down hard. Elise was very handsome, and didn't take anything seriously except the money value of a wealthy lover, so I contented myself with her. Why, what's the matter? You look quite upset."

The sudden tensing of Muller's frame and the sharp intake of breath that flooded his cheeks with color had given way to an expression of deep sadness.

"Please—let me get this clearly," he began, not heeding Volkner's last remark. "You said that Tony—was the Lehman girl's sister-in-law. As far as I know Elise Lehman had only one brother, her step-brother, Hubert Lohr."

"Quite right. Hubert Lohr. Tony has been his wife for the past three years. Her maiden name was Kerner."

CHAPTER XVII.

MULLER DROPS THE FALSE TRAIL.

NEITHER spoke for some time. Muller sat motionless, his saddened eyes staring out ahead, seeing nothing. Behind them the keen brain was battling with a heart that rebelled against what it would not, but must, believe. Volkner sipped the tea that had grown cold and gazed now and then at his companion. His own thoughts were busy. Out of them he spoke finally:

"But I don't see why Wallroth should go to all that trouble and expense—and racking his own nerves besides, just to find out why she did it."

"That isn't the question here. He wants to find out who did it. Elise Lehman did not kill herself."

Volkner gave a sharp exclamation. "But the papers said—"

"Yes. Press and public took it for a case of suicide. And they will never know any better—if I can help it." The last words were spoken low and sadly as Muller passed his hand wearily across his forehead. "But I know and a few others know. I am telling you because I owe you an explanation, and an answer to your question of some few minutes back, just before Louisa came. You asked me why I thought I might need the man I sent away—do you remember?"

"Yes, yes. Well?"

"He was a secret service man. And he was waiting for—orders that I might give him—to make an arrest. But I sent him away, as you see, for I had been mistaken. There will be no arrest."

Again Volkner paled. Then he shook himself impatiently and looked straight at Muller. "And you said something about a dagger—did you mean—could you possibly think—" Volkner sprang from his chair and leaned forward threatening toward the sad-eyed old man opposite.

"Steady there, steady," said Muller calmly, but with a note of real sympathy in his voice. "I told you I had been mistaken. Please sit down."

Volkner sat down mechanically, as if in obedience to orders more than of his own volition. "But how did you ever—why should any one think that I—my God! Why should I do such a crazy thing?"

"I never was quite convinced that you did it."

"But you suspected me? You came here to hound me."

"Please don't feel so bitter about it. Many another honest man has come under suspicion without half the evidence against him that there was against you."

"What evidence?"

"You were Elise Lehman's lover at one time. You said things to Baron Wallroth which you thought would prevent his marriage to her—but they only resulted in a duel. You were absent from the Mantini Pension, secretly, from May 27 to May 31."

Volkner half rose, then fell back into his chair. "How did you discover that?"

"It is my present business to find out where any former lover of Elise Lehman was on May 29, the day she was killed," replied Muller. "I do not yet know where you were on that day. But I do know that you have been more nervous, more upset and irritable since that day, even than your ill-health would warrant. Still I do not suspect you—now—of having killed Elise Lehman. Therefore, it is no business of mine where you spent those days."

Volkner gnawed his lip in silence for a moment, then he spoke harshly with a sudden outburst. "I went to Verona those days and spent most of my time trying to keep my younger brother from taking his own life."

"I am very, very sorry—if I called up sad memories," said Muller softly. "It is one of the hardest things my work compels me to do, to inflict suffering on the innocent."

"I owed it to you and you upset me so that you—wrung the story out of me. The boy had got into trouble—bad company—gave notes with my father's name on them, a band of notorious forgers had him in their power—under the guise of money lenders."

Muller gave a sharp exclamation, and Volkner paused and looked at him.

"Yes, yes, I know," said the detective. "The law has its eye on those people. I was to take up that case, but put it aside when Baron Wallroth sent for me. But rest assured when I do take it up, they will be brought to justice. There's many another rash lad in their power."

"Yes, I imagine it. Robert is inexperienced and young, but it's all settled now, thank God. I made him go back to Vienna and tell the president of the bank all about it. We want to save my father any annoyance and excitement. He is very ill."

Muller nodded with a glance of sympathy. "You see, it was a good thing we met, after all. For now, when I take up the case against those forgers"—his voice dropped low—"and I fear I shall be able to do that very soon—your brother can give me valuable information. But will you help me now? Tell me something about the Lohrs."

Volkner opened his lips as if to speak, then suddenly started and gazed sharply at Muller. There was another pause, then he laughed suddenly.

Muller raised his head and asked, "What are you laughing at?"

Volkner still smiled as he replied: "I was laughing at my own foolish thoughts when you asked me about the Lohrs—and when you described Tony a few minutes back. I suddenly wondered why you wanted to know about them. Then I realized how perfectly absurd was the idea that Tony—Mrs. Lohr—could have anything to do with the Lehman murder. Anyway, you're looking for a man, aren't you? And even if you knew that it was a woman who committed the crime, it couldn't by any possibility be that woman."

"Yes, the thought is absurd," said Muller slowly. "But please tell me all you know of them."

"I have nothing but good to say of them. But if I didn't, neither you nor any one else should ever hear a word from me that could possibly harm them."

Muller smiled. "You're so fond of them?"

Volkner nodded. "He was my school chum. He is still my friend in spite of the fact—or possibly because of it—I mean because he is so entirely different from me. And I'm still in love with his wife and always shall be—in the very best way. So if you want to hear good of those two people you can question me all you like."

"I do," replied Muller, with a strange smile. "I want to hear every possible favorable thing you can say about them."

"We used to call Hubert Don Quixote at school—those who weren't quite so well acquainted with literature, contented themselves by saying that he was crazy. Possibly he was, as far as any creative artist is crazy. I remember once when he beat one of the boys black and blue because he had made an indecent caricature of an old apple woman who had a stand outside the school. And yet another time when our history professor made a rather slurring remark about Schiller's rewriting of history, Lohr exclaimed aloud: "God bless him for that. Where would we be without ideals?"

Most of the boys hooted, but the professor rose, went to Lohr's bench and shook his hand. I could tell you a hundred such stories, and Hubert Lohr hasn't changed in the slightest. His quarrel with his benefactor, the late Baron Wallroth, was quite characteristic of him. It was Baron Wallroth who helped him to study and sent him to the conservatory.

Muller nodded. "Yes, I've heard that. What was the trouble between them?"

"Lohr's whole life is an expression of gratitude to the Wallroth family and yet he refused to sell himself even to please his benefactor. It was this way, the baron had a friend, a rich business man whose only daughter and heiress fell desperately in love with Lohr—Hubert's mighty good looking. Her father had never refused her anything she wanted before, so she thought of course he could buy this husband for her. The baron thought it would be a wonderful thing for Lohr to come into so much money, and the girl was extremely pretty, although very self-willed. So he wanted to help it along. But Lohr refused to have anything to do with it. He didn't like the girl and he was too honest to buy himself a career on such terms."

"That was great," exclaimed Muller. "He must be a real man."

"He is, indeed!" continued Volkner. "But it cost him Baron Wallroth's friendship. Hubert was sorry for it, too, but he could not consent to such a marriage. I know that he was very unhappy about it and that his most ardent wish was that some opportunity might come for him to show his deep and lasting gratitude for the Wallroth family."

"Does he still see anything of the family?" asked Muller.

"Since the old baron's death the baroness and Edmund invite him occasionally to one of their musical evenings."

"Does his wife go with him?"

"No, I don't think so. I remember that he told me once that when he did take Tony to introduce her to the baroness after their marriage, the lady was rather cool toward her. She may not have approved of making a friend of a singer. But that only shows she didn't know Tony Lohr."

"Did Baron Edmund know Mrs. Lohr?"

"I don't think so," said Volkner. "He may have seen her once or twice. I'm not sure."

"H-m—" murmured Muller. "Then it wasn't so daring after all—" Aloud he said: "Mr. Lohr is a mountain climber, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Volkner. "It's his favorite exercise. He has conquered several of the most dangerous peaks."

"And he is left-handed?"

"He was—that is—he has trained himself to use both hands on account of his piano playing. But in unguarded moments he is very apt to use the left hand. Why do you ask this?"

Volkner moved uneasily as he spoke the last words.

"And he is a composer," continued Muller with a certain sad persistence.

Volkner's eyes shone. "He is a composer of eminent ability."

"Yes," said Muller. "He is a true, creative artist. But let's talk of something else now. Here comes your sister."

Milla von Widener came quickly through the now rapidly filling room, came straight to her brother and laid both hands on his shoulder.

"Robert wrote you?" she exclaimed, and her soft eyes shone through tears.

Her brother nodded and drew her down to the chair beside him. "What's the matter, Milly?" he exclaimed softly.

"Mamma wrote me all about it. Oh, you wonderfully wise boy, you. You're so good—so good. You saved Robert's life, his whole existence. And papa's life, too, I am sure. And at such a big sacrifice for yourself, all that money—"

"Hush, dear. It's all over now and it's all right," said Volkner, looking over at Muller. But the latter had tactfully subsided behind a railway guide which he was studying with apparent interest.

The evening passed off pleasantly, although Volkner fell into a brown study now and then, his brows wrinkling as if some problem were worrying him. The old detective was chatty and cheerful, but Milla von Widener had known him only for a few hours, so she could not realize that Joseph

Muller seemed to have grown ten years older in the last two hours. Once he laid his hand on Volkner's arm and asked suddenly: "They have a child, haven't they?"

"Who?" exclaimed Volkner in surprise.

"Lohrs."

"Oh, yes. Surely."

"A little girl, who is blind?"

"She is threatened with blindness. But how did you know that? The child had scarlet fever, which left her eyes very weak. They have taken her to Tony's mother up in the mountains, for the summer."

"Thanks. I must leave you now," said Muller, rising. "I must return to Venice."

"When are you going? What are you going to do now? Why did you want to know about Lohrs?" A sudden uneasy fear tugged at Volkner's heart, but Muller did not answer. He was already making his farewells to Mrs. von Widener and he soon slipped away into the outer darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK IN THE IVY COTTAGE.

ON the morning of June 10 Muller was back in his own home. After a hasty breakfast he wrote a few words on a card and addressed them to Professor Walter Thorn. Then he got into the waiting cab and drove to the Wallroth house, leaving the card to be given to Professor Thorn as soon as he arose.

The detective drove on out toward the suburbs. At the foot of Red Hill he called to the driver to halt.

"Wait here," he said as he got out and walked slowly up the hill.

It was another glorious morning, as fresh and fragrant as when he had passed that way a few days before. But Muller's heart was sad and heavy and he scarcely seemed to see the beauty around him. He paused by the blossoming apple tree again and put out his hand. Then he dropped it, shook his head and went on for about a hundred paces. He halted again, turned back and walked quickly to the tree. He cut off three of the most beautiful blossom-laden twigs, nodding to them with a sad smile in his eyes. His lips were tight set.

As he neared the Lohr cottage he saw the young composer standing at the window. The detective paused, half hidden by a bush, and studied the man who stood at the window. Yes, there was pride and firm determination on this handsome face. This man could live up to his ideals, even though it cost him dear. There was a hint of passion, too. Noble passion that might well carry him away at time and lead him into a deed which he had not sought.

Lohr was staring out at the distant sky. His eyes were grave and sad, his pale lips pressed tight together. As Muller watched, another figure came to the window—a woman's figure, tall, strong, and graceful. On her arm Tony Lohr carried a little child, a pale, frail little creature, its eyes hidden behind a green shade. The little blond head drooped onto its mother's shoulder. She bent over it and kissed the soft curls. Then she put her free arm around her husband's neck.

He started up from his sad thoughts and their eyes met in a long look. Then Hubert Lohr put both arms around his wife and child and caught them to him with passionate pressure. It was at this moment that Muller came out from behind the bush and walked toward the little house.

Lohr saw him—and smiled a welcome. He was at the garden gate before Muller could touch the bell.

"You've been to Venice?" he asked as they walked the little garden.

"Yes, I have just returned."

"It was wrong of me to let you go. I should not have done it."

"Oh, no, Mr. Lohr. It was quite natural."

They were in the room now. Tony had sunk down into a chair. Her face was ghastly pale as she held the baby closely to her. She nodded to the detective without a word.

Muller crossed quickly to her and handed her the blossoming apple twigs with a kindly smile. The young woman smiled, too, but great tears ran down her cheeks.

Lohr was the calmest of the three now. The natural color had come back to his cheeks as he pushed forward a chair for Muller. Hubert Lohr was one of those

strong characters who have too much self-respect and dignity to fight the inevitable—and who have self-respect and dignity enough to follow the dictates of their own conscience.

The three sat around the table in the ivy-shaded corner as if united for an hour of social intercourse. Tony still held the apple blossoms in her hand, and behind their pink haze her pale face shone transfigured by the look of devotion in her eyes as she turned toward her husband.

"Madonna of the apple blossoms," thought Muller.

"Then you thought it natural—that I did not speak at once?" continued Lohr calmly. "Well, you understand the impulse of self-preservation—you must meet it often enough in your work."

"It is a natural instinct," replied Muller. "As you say, I meet it always, in every case."

"If you had not come back at once—come back to me—which shows me that you know—all—I should have written Volkner immediately. I have reproached myself bitterly that I should have caused him any annoyance or possible excitement. And I have written a letter already—a letter to police headquarters. Here it is, Mr. Muller. It contains all information which you and the authorities need."

"Hubert!"

"Tony! Tony, dear! Don't break down now when you've been brave so long. I suppose you know, Mr. Muller"—Lohr turned to the detective again—"that it was my wife who covered my tracks—who protected me. I fear it will cost her dear."

"That, too, was quite natural and comprehensible," said Muller as he slipped the letter containing Lohr's confession into his pocket. "But now tell me—how—how did it ever happen?"

"That I killed Elise?" Lohr drew a deep breath. "May I go back a little? It may be easier to understand and I want to tell you the story from the beginning. Look at our little girl here"—his voice was very serious now. "You see how ill she still is, how frail and delicate. She is threatened with blindness as a result of scarlet fever. And we are very poor. I give lessons and

my wife embroiders for a linen shop. But all we can do is to keep this very modest roof over our heads, and buy sufficient food and the most necessary clothes for ourselves. Everything else is a luxury that is beyond us. The few pretty things you see here are presents from my pupils. I am paying for my piano on installments. You could easily see how an illness would take the very last cent that we have saved. Our little Rosie fell ill, and we were soon at our wits' end. Then Tony told me that her mother had written her, saying she would take the child for a few months. My mother-in-law lives in a little town in the Enns Valley. She has a small annuity, just enough for her to live on. The doctor told us that Rosie must have a change of air and that a few months in the mountains might set her up again. My mother-in-law was willing to have both my dear ones with her for the summer. We hoped that our little girl would be so strengthened by the change and the good air that she could endure the operation that might save her eyes.

"You can imagine how happy we were at the chance. Tony and Rosie left here on May 2. We had arranged that we should write to one another about twice a week. Tony's letters came from Enns, as I expected naturally, so you can imagine my surprise when, on May 28, I received a letter from my wife written from Salzburg. It contained a confession that she had been deceiving me, and that while Rosie was in Enns with her grandmother, Tony herself was in Salzburg.

"It seems that during the last days of April, when we were both in deep despair about our little girl, my wife received a letter from Elise. The latter told her that in spite of all I had said to prevent it, she had promised to marry Wallroth. The baron had hired a house for her in Salzburg, where she was to spend the summer, and she wanted to have some one with her, as she was afraid she would be bored to death. Wallroth was very jealous, and insisted that she should cut loose from all that had been her life for the past two or three years.

"As she had not seen Tony since we were married, my wife knew nothing of what Elise had been doing these last years.

That was exactly what the latter wanted. She asked Tony if she could come to her without my knowing it—for Elise knew I would never consent. In return for this, Elise offered to bear all expense that might be incurred for Rosie's operation and recovery."

Lohr paused when he reached this point. Muller took up the story.

"I understand. Your wife accepted this offer, as any good mother would have done in her place. And she even consented to deceive you for the sake of her child. It was she who induced her mother to write that invitation that she might be earning the money to pay Rosie's board. She took the child to her mother in Enns, then went on herself to Linz, where she met your sister. Is that right, Mrs. Lohr?"

Tony nodded. "Yes," she said low. "But I insisted on being called her maid, not even a companion. I thought there'd be less danger of any one noticing me then."

"Your sister-in-law met a man in Linz, did she not?" asked Muller.

"Yes. He was her lover."

"But he did not see you?"

"I was only the maid. He scarcely noticed me."

"Yes, he told me. I met him. He was the usual sort—the sort women of that kind are apt to choose—for the lover—but not the husband," said Muller. "Then you were with your sister-in-law from the 1st of May—and you wrote to your husband, sending the letters from Enns with your mother's help?"

"Yes; until I became so utterly disgusted with Elise's rottenness that I could endure it no longer. We had a serious quarrel one day. I told her that Hubert was quite right in his assertion that Wall-roth should be saved from a marriage with her, by force if necessary, and that I could not stay with her any longer. She pretended to be terribly repentant, and told me that I ought to realize it was not easy for her to find her way back into a respectable life."

"She asked me if I would stay a few days longer until she found some one to take my place. She insisted that I must

keep the two hundred gulden she had already given me for Rosie, and then we made plans for my departure."

"You were talking that over, out in the garden," cut in Muller.

The others looked at him in surprise.

Tony nodded, and continued: "But the very next day I found her writing a glowing love letter to Goldie Boy, and kissing the violets he had given her when they parted. This was too much for me. I brought the hundred gulden I still had left from the money she had given me, laid it down in front of her, and then—then I wrote my husband."

Mrs. Lohr sighed deeply, then covered her face, sobbing. Lohr took one hand gently from her face and held it in his own.

"You did quite right, Tony," he said. "You couldn't imagine it would—turn out as it did."

"It was on receipt of that letter that you went to Salzburg?" asked Muller of Lohr.

"Yes," he replied. "I arrived about five o'clock on the 29th of May. Tony hadn't told me where they were living, any more than to speak of the 'Gray House.' But I found that this name was quite sufficient. I met them both by the river bank near the house. They were both equally astonished and even a little frightened."

"Don't make any fuss; don't let any one know," was Elise's first request. I was perfectly willing to keep the whole matter quiet. I know how violent I can be when I'm really angry. I remembered this, and tried to keep calm. I acquiesced in their arrangement that I should be smuggled into the house unseen, for Elise did not want any talk or gossip that might come to Wall-roth's ears."

"And so your wife went back," cut in Muller, "ostensibly to get a forgotten feather boa; but in reality she opened the side garden gate and the back door of the house."

Tony nodded to this. Her husband continued with some effort: "Elise and I went into the house from the river side. Tony was waiting for us—for me—in the meadow. We had planned to meet there."

Muller sat up very straight. "Then you quarreled with your sister?"

"Yes. I reproached her for having drawn Tony into a lie by appealing to her love for her child. Then she offered me money, much more than Tony had returned to her. I told her not to say another word about that. I would not touch her money, I said, but I would insist that she break her engagement with the baron. If she did this of her own free will I would not tell him anything; but if she did not, I would open his eyes to her character and her life.

"In my growing excitement I had snatched up something which I turned and twisted in my hands. You know how one does it. It was not until a second or two later that I realized that what I held was a sharp-pointed antique dagger which had been lying on the desk, as if used for a paper knife. Not until—the very last minute in fact—was I conscious that I held the dagger.

"I told Elise that if I could prevent it no Wallroth should ever stain his name by marrying a woman who broke all her promises, who was planning even now to deceive him when she should be his wife—planning to drag him down into the mire where she dwelt.

"Don't be absurd!" she screamed at me. "Wallroth isn't particularly brilliant, but he's got sense enough not to expect an actress to be a saint. I do not intend to give him up, and he will marry me, for he's hopelessly in love with me. All your intriguing won't do you any good. I'm not deceiving him. He knows perfectly well whom he's marrying—just as you knew whom you married."

"She spoke these last words with an ugly sneer, but they ended in an inarticulate murmur—for—for I had already struck her down in my insane rage."

Hubert Lohr's face was pale, but he sat quite calmly as if in complete control of mind and body. Muller was excited. He leaned forward eagerly, laying his hands on Lohr's knee.

"Then you struck her down because she insulted your wife's name?"

The flash in his own eyes woke an answering gleam in Tony's.

But Lohr shook his head decidedly.

"No, Mr. Muller," he said calmly, "that isn't how it was. I know that that fact could be used as an extenuating circumstance to shorten my term of imprisonment—but I prefer to stay by the truth. How could I hide behind a mere word? Why, I wouldn't dare look my wife in the face if I should save myself in that way—after what she has done.

"No, Mr. Muller, self-preservation is all right, but it must not ruin the best in us. Last evening my mother-in-law brought our little Rosie back to us, for we wanted to see her once more—and we talked it all over. We both decided that we must give up this foolish hiding. It is unworthy of us. In the letter which I gave you just now is Tony's confession, too."

"Thank God that I've got it out at last!" exclaimed Tony.

Her husband continued: "Yes, thank God! I can tell you, Mr. Muller, that my degradation began with all the hokuspokus that was necessary to hide my deed. As to the deed itself, I do not repent it. I would do the same again under the same circumstances. That can't hurt me—the inner *me*.

"I did not kill Elise in my anger at her insulting words about my wife. Nothing that she could say can harm Tony. What made me mad and blind with rage was the absolute truth of her assertion that Edmund Wallroth was hopelessly in love with her, and that he would marry her in spite of all I could do. Her tone and manner as she said this put her on the level of any courtesan of the streets who knows her power over the lowest instincts in man.

"It was that—the thought of the degradation she has brought to our honest family—and the degradation into which she was planning to drag down the people to whom I owe so much—I struck out blindly. I had the dagger in my hand. I knew it when I struck—that is all that you need to know."

Lohr rose. "We can go now, can't we?"

His wife rose, too, and stood beside him. "I'll be ready in a few moments," she said, although she caught at her husband as if to save her from falling.

"No, no. We don't need you now," replied Lohr, as he pressed her gently down into the chair again. "We can let you stay with Rosie for a while yet. Can't we, Mr. Muller? You won't run away—we can't run away. It's only the professional criminal who can escape."

Lohr kissed his wife and child and took up his hat.

"I am ready, Mr. Muller," he said with a touch of impatience.

Muller was on his feet, too. "Yes, Mrs. Lohr, you must stay with your little girl," he said, "and if you permit it, I will look in now and then—to bring you news—until you see your husband again."

Tony Lohr rose, controlling herself with a strong effort. She went to the door with her husband, kissed him once more, laid the little girl in his arms for a moment, and held out her hand to Muller.

"You are so kind," she said low. "Stay with him—don't forsake him."

She went to the window again, and, parting the ivy, looked out after them as she had that other day. But this time she was strong and steadfast.

Ten minutes later Muller and Lohr were in the cab, which set out rapidly toward the city. Lohr had been leaning back, absorbed in his own thoughts. Suddenly he looked out of the window.

"How is he driving?" he exclaimed. "This isn't the way to police headquarters."

"We're not going there," replied Muller calmly.

"Where are we going?"

"To the Wallroth mansion."

Hubert Lohr sank together.

"Why?" he exclaimed. "Why must we go there?"

"It will be for the best," returned the detective; "and when you do give yourself up, it will be much better to do it in Salzburg. You'll save yourself a lot of trouble and time."

"Yes? And suppose I escape on the journey?"

"I'm not afraid. If you hadn't intended to give yourself up you would not have given me your written confession which is

now in my pocket. No, I'm not afraid you'll run away, but—I'll go with you. It's an all-night journey in the train—and one's nerves do break down sometimes. I want to help you to return unharmed to your loved ones. You must have courage to live—for such a woman. And what a woman!"

Lohr could not help smiling at this, and held out his hand to his wife's elderly admirer.

"And she put one over on me, too," said Muller more cheerily. "In all the long years of my career it has never yet happened to me that I had my mind fixed on one certain person and yet talked to that person without knowing who it was—without recognizing my prey. Mrs. Lohr is the only one who can say that she completely fooled Joseph Muller. I can understand how she would be the woman to regain her self-possession so soon after the deed. But you yourself were very calm."

"Do you think so?" said Lohr.

"I know it. You could not have conceived the masquerade and carried it through otherwise."

"I had to do something to save Tony and myself. We had to make it look like a suicide."

"They still think it a suicide—the press and public."

"But you found it out."

"Yes, you threw the dagger from you in your first excitement and horror. I, alone, found the mark where it had fallen. There were a few other little mistakes, too."

"I do not doubt it," said Lohr.

They were quiet after that until the wagon stopped in front of the Wallroth house.

Muller asked the servant who opened the door whether he could see Professor Thorn.

"I have orders to take you to him at once," said the man, and added with a look of interest: "He's all excited."

Muller did not heed this last remark, but passed on quickly up the stairs. Thorn was waiting for them, and held out his hand eagerly to Muller. But his eyes were turned on the good-looking man who came in quietly behind the detective.

"Your card certainly excited me," said the painter. "You wrote me that you had discovered the man we are seeking."

"Discovered him and brought him right with me," replied Muller. "Here he is."

Thorn gasped, and the detective continued calmly:

"Let me introduce Mr. Hubert Lohr, Elise Lehman's stepbrother. In him you will learn to know one of those rare human beings who have the courage to follow the promptings of higher morality, even though it may bring them in conflict with the letter of the law. Mr. Lohr, this gentleman is Professor Walter Thorn, Baron Wallroth's cousin. As I have already told you, it is entirely his fault that there was any investigation of this case. But do not blame him for it. He, too, was only following the promptings of his conscience."

Lohr stood quietly with a sad smile. Smaller matters did not seem to touch him now. He turned wearily to the painter, who stood staring at him, still bewildered.

"Yes, professor," he said, "Mr. Muller is speaking the truth. I killed my step-sister—killed her in a moment, of insane anger, with the mad thought that I must prevent the disgrace and unhappiness she would bring to this house. You may not know how much I owe this family."

"Yes, yes!" replied Thorn holding out both hands to Lohr. "I do know something of it. You are wonderful, wonderful!"

"Who are you raving about now?" asked Wallroth coming in. "Oh, Lohr, you're here. I can understand my cousin. Yes, you are wonderful, for you have the courage to tell the truth."

"I've always told you the truth, baron. Oh, if you had only believed me!" Wallroth looked at Lohr surprised. But he staggered back against the table at the young composer's next words. "For then I would not—have needed—to kill Elise."

The four men sat together in earnest conversation for nearly two hours.

Finally Muller spoke. "This is a case from my private practice. I am not compelled to give an accounting to any one except you two gentlemen who have engaged me. My conscience certainly does not

compel me to sacrifice such a man"—here he laid his hand on Lohr's shoulder—"and the wonderful woman who loves him—to sacrifice such people to a paragraph of law. No one else will discover the true trail. And as for the few who know that there is a trail to follow—well, I do not mind that they should think I have failed this time. I can afford it. As far as I am concerned, Mr. Lohr, you will have no further bother about this matter."

"I shall say nothing," said Thorn.

"And I am willing—that it shall rest right here," said Wallroth.

But Lohr shook his head. "I thank you all so much—oh, so very much," he began. "And were my wife—not just what she is—I might accept your silence. But I must refuse it even with deepest gratitude. For neither Tony or I will be happy until we have done what the law demands. We must be free of this horrible secret that is hanging over us. I'm going to Salzburg to-day."

"Then we need stay here no longer," said Muller calmly as they all rose. "Take my cab and go back to your wife. I will call for you this evening."

"And to-morrow my mother and I will call on your wife, Lohr," said Wallroth, who was beginning to show the strain of these last hours.

He held out both hands. "And you need have no further care for their welfare until you return to them. The Wallroths, too, know what it is to be grateful."

Tony Lohr was acquitted. For she had only done what any woman might have done out of love for her husband. Hubert Lohr was given all possible attenuating circumstances, and his sentence was shortened because he had voluntarily given himself up.

Wallroth engaged a lawyer of high reputation and ability to defend him. And he also used his influence to obtain a pardon at the end of half a year. He had done other things for Lohr, too. When the latter returned to his home the success attending the public performance of several of his compositions won for him a well-paid position as conductor of a leading orchestra.

Baroness Wallroth took little Rosie into her heart, and her ready aid averted a threatening catastrophe. A favorable operation saved the child's sight.

In the calm and happy days that followed, Joseph Muller was numbered among the outspoken admirers of Mrs. Tony Lohr and won for himself a place in her heart

(The end.)

and home which no one dared dispute. He explained it by saying that she was the only person who had ever outwitted him in the course of his long career.

And as for the case itself, Muller says that he does not count it as his ninety-fourth conviction, and he is perfectly willing to have it considered one of his failures.



The Purpose

by

William Merriam Rouse

DOWNSTAIRS in the basement of old Aaron Pratt's boarding house the river drivers and the boys from the mill were playing poker; upstairs in the parlor Yvonne Gonyo would be reading a book, or maybe just standing at the window and staring out into the cold spring night with the pupils of her gray eyes so big and black that they looked like burnt holes in a blanket.

Jed Sanders stood hesitant upon the board sidewalk, as square and solid as a block from a butt log, with a little package of candy from the store in his hand. If he went down into the basement—the doghouse, the boys called it—he would ache to be with Yvonne; and if he went up there where she was he would endure another kind of torture from her. Also Slick Buckley might be there, tall and good looking and witty.

The door of the doghouse opened and old Aaron Pratt himself came up, bringing with

him a rush of yellow lamplight and heated air thick with the smell of tobacco and alcohol. The old man had been a famous collar-and-elbow wrestler in his day, but now, although he feared nothing that walked the earth, the years had taken hold of his legs so that he mounted the steps with pain. He stopped, breathing hard, and peered grimly at Jed. His glance dropped to the package, and he sniffed.

"They's a good game started, Jeddy," he said, with a note of something close to kindness in his voice. "Better go down and set in a while. Buckley's brought some licker."

Sanders looked up at the parlor windows. He glimpsed the head of Yvonne, with the crown of misty dark hair that he loved so well, and drew in a breath that brought chest muscles straining against his flannel shirt. He knew then that he was going upstairs; and somehow it seemed as though the way that his feet would take

had been settled before the stars were. He shook his head.

"Guess I'll go talk to Yvonne," he said slowly.

Aaron Pratt wheezed in silence for a moment. Then he did a thing so rare with him that Sanders had never before seen it in the years he had worked, off and on, at Little Falls. He dropped his big and twisted hand upon the younger man's shoulder and let it rest there.

"You're a good boy, Jeddy," he rumbled, "but you're a damn fool."

Jed stiffened, and relaxed as he remembered Pratt's age and realized his good intentions.

Nevertheless there was a growl in his reply. "Nobody can't say anything against Yvonne."

"Of course! She's a good girl, too. A durned good worker, and she earns more'n I pay her for waiting on table. She has the run of things like she was my own daughter."

"She's too good for Slick Buckley!" exclaimed Jed, swept out of his self-control by some subtle contagion of sympathy from Aaron Pratt. "He's a skunk!"

"I calculate he is, Jeddy." Aaron let his hand fall away and sighed. "Talking never done any good about anything, but you're a damn fool jest the same, my boy."

He lumbered on along the sidewalk, up the stairs and into the house, leaving Jed Sanders with a new thought in his head. The new thought was that he was a particular kind of a fool. Up to then it had seemed like the immemorial two men and a girl, with the immemorial ending when one of them gets her and the other marries somebody else after a time, or doesn't, and gets along. No, he was a fool; and the end of a fool in his folly is never the same as the end of an ordinary man.

He went upstairs and into the parlor, as he had known that he would do. Yvonne was alone.

She smiled, and something like the sparkle of a star looked at him out of her eyes. Jed stood in the doorway, his shoulders almost touching the casing on each side, and gazed at her as a one-man dog gazes at its master. Jed looked out of little, deep-set

eyes, from beneath an upthrust forest of hair that never would stay parted and brushed down.

She was taller than he was by half a head, and she had that instinct that in some women leads inevitably to the right kind of clothes even in mountain villages like Little Falls. She was something higher than he had ever known before. All that which the soul of Jed Sanders knew how to reach for in aspiration came toward him across the boarding house parlor.

He trembled. "Want some candy, Yvonne?"

She took the package and opened it indifferently. It was true enough that she was above the sweets and cheap jewelry that touched the other girls. There was good blood in the French-English-Irish mixture that her veins carried.

"Sit down, Jed," she said. "I thought you'd be in the doghouse to-night with Slick and the rest of them. He brought up a jug from the railroad to-day."

"I rather be here." He sat upon the bench in front of the rickety organ with his high boots braced far apart. Buckley would have gone over and sat upon the sofa at her side, but Sanders did not dare to. Yes, he was a fool.

She laughed, and when she laughed there was a little wrinkle along the side of her nose that he had wondered at and longed to touch with his lips these many days.

"You're a good old soul, Jed. Most men would rather be with the jug."

"Slick Buckley would." Sanders knew by the darkening of her eyes that he had blundered, and inwardly he cursed himself. He had little hope, if any, of winning her for himself, but he did hope, and almost pray, that he could keep her from Buckley. Always he blundered when he let that desire be seen.

"You're a fool, Jed Sanders," she told him ominously.

He knew that it was this flaming temper that had been unspoken in the mind of Aaron Pratt.

"Twice to-night I've been told that, Yvonne."

"Well—what do you think about it?" The cruelty of this was in her voice—in

the scorn that rang through it like the tolling of a distant bell. It would have hit Sanders anyway, but coming on top of what Aaron had said, and his own thoughts about himself, it stirred the depths of him—the still, deep depths that in any man are not stirred many times during his life.

"I think so, too!" He grew husky and shaking. "I'm a fool to hang on with you—to keep trying to get you to marry me! Of course! Everybody knows it, and so do I! A good old soul! Hell's bells! You won't marry no good old soul, Yvonne!"

It was the first time he had ever cursed in her presence; and that alone should have indicated that she was playing with a situation of magnitude. Probably it did tell her. At least her eyes fell for an instant before they looked at him with the little stars in them again.

"How do you know I won't?" she asked.

"Will you?" Sanders half rose.

"I won't promise."

"Well—you ain't said no!"

"Nor yes, either!"

"Yvonne!" As he spoke her name it was a prayer for mercy. "Don't joke with me!"

"I didn't joke. I might marry you—or anybody else, for that matter."

Jed dropped back to his seat and groaned.

"You're the same as always. I wish you'd say either yes or no, right out."

"You wouldn't want me to say no, right out, would you?"

Before Sanders could reply to that there was a step in the hall, and they both turned. Charley Buckley, whose poker playing as well as his appearance had earned his nickname, came into the doorway and paused, smiling upon them. There was no need for him to frown at a rival like Jed Sanders.

Slick had been drinking more than was good for him, but not enough to dull his eye or put uncertainty into his feet. He was dressed up with a white collar, and, as boss of the gang of drivers, he could afford to have clothes that fitted him.

"Hello, folks!" he said. He took out the big, pearl-handled knife that he was forever playing with and clipped the end

from a cigar. "Didn't think I'd show up, did you?"

Jed's glance had gone to the face of Yvonne. The appearance of Slick Buckley would mean exactly what he saw written there; no more and no less. He saw a touch of rose under her fair skin and a lift of the head that his coming had not been able to produce.

"Come in, Charley," she said. That was all, but Sanders thought he heard a caress in the words.

His powerful hands sank helplessly and clasped between his legs. He felt like a clown, perched there in front of the organ. Buckley swung across the room and sat down upon the sofa beside Yvonne.

"Play us a tune, Jed." He laughed, tossed the pearl knife, glistening in the lamplight, and caught it deftly. "Play 'The Girl I Left Behind Me.'"

Sanders felt himself scarlet. He saw the gleam of amusement in the eyes of Yvonne; and he realized that he was even less than a third person there in that room. He was not much more than the battered organ at his back.

"I can't play it, Slick," he said slowly, "but I can do it. And I guess I better."

He got up quickly, and had gone as far as the door before Yvonne Gonyo tried to stop him.

"Oh, don't get mad, Jed! Charley did not mean anything."

Sanders was in the hall as she finished, and he kept steadily on until he stood out beneath the stars. Ice crackled under his feet and a keen wind bit at his face. He pulled himself together, and found that he was in the middle of the highway, going aimlessly.

Why not go on? Yvonne and Aaron and he were all of one mind about him, and if he could stop being a fool it would be a good thing. Why not force himself on, away from Little Falls for good? They needed men at the Cross River mill, he had heard, and never yet where good men were needed had he been refused a job. His money was in his belt, his pipe and plug in his pocket. He knew that if he turned back to the boarding house that night he would not leave at all. He must go on!

Jed Sanders walked all night over the frozen March roads, and at seven o'clock the next morning he went to work with the gang in the Cross River sawmill. He did two men's work that day, and when night came again he was sure of his job. He found a boarding place, and utter weariness made him sleep from supper to breakfast without a thought of the misty hair and the gray-black eyes of Yvonne Gonyo.

For a time thereafter all of the days of Jed Sanders were exactly alike. He worked, he ate, he went to the small room that was his own, and sat, booted, with a dead pipe gripped between his teeth, until such time as his head dropped forward and the pipe fell clattering to the floor. Then he knew that he could sleep; that the face of Yvonne would forsake him until the gray light of dawn upon his eyes awoke him again.

He could not get rid of the memory of her, nor of the pain that ran like fire whenever he thought of Slick Buckley. If only he could stop that! Buckley faithful to Yvonne? Not for six months after they were married! In the doghouse there were no reticences, and there Buckley had revealed himself. It was as sure that he would tire of his wife and beat her as it was that some other woman would come to his call when he chose.

For himself Jed Sanders did not so much care now. Indeed, he had largely ceased to care about himself since that hour when Aaron Pratt spoke to him and called him by his real name.

Jed, who had never before speculated upon the nature of things, thought much now, and came completely to a standstill in the effort to find his own meaning.

Many another man could take his place in the world with cant-hook and pike-pole. He was of no meaning to the girl he loved. He could not win her—he could not stop caring for her. Of what special use was he? To what purpose did he live? No more than to any other man did Heaven vouchsafe a sign at the asking of the question.

So the days of Sanders passed, and so, blankly, his mind stood when a new man came to the Cross River mill and went to

work. An able-bodied, talkative man, who sought out Jed when they learned that they both had worked at Little Falls, and re-tailed the latest news.

He had been on the drive, he said, and he had quit after a fight with Slick Buckley. The newcomer cursed Slick up and down, back for ten generations, and down to the lowest depths of the next world.

"I wouldn't be Buckley's dog, nor his wife, for a million dollars," he said. "They's a gal he's going to marry, down there in the village, an almighty pretty gal! She'd ought to know better. Old Pratt's tried to stop it, but he can't do nothing. Buckley 'll use her like dirt."

That night when Jed shouldered his peevie to go home he knew that it was for the last time in that place. After supper he drew his pay, swung his few belongings over his shoulder at the end of a stick, and at daylight he met old Aaron Pratt just as he was coming out, blinking into the morning, from the front door of the boarding house.

The old man started at sight of Jed.

"I was right after all," he said. "You be a fool."

Without a word Sanders pushed past him into the house. He went upstairs, took the first empty room he found, and came down again when the breakfast bell rang, with his jaw set and his eyes as inscrutable as glass marbles.

No man, not even Slick Buckley, would dare to say much to him; but he knew that amusement would gleam in the face of Yvonne Gonyo when she put his smoking breakfast down in front of him.

So it proved.

"Hello!" she cried, with a ring of genuine surprise in her voice. The clatter of eating broke as the long table took note of the meeting. Shirts of blue, green, red, checks and plaids, rioted to the gaze of Sanders. "Did you get homesick, Jed?"

"Uh-huh," he answered lamely, with the sound of a snicker from the far end of the table in his ears.

The rattle of knife on plate began again, and Yvonne began with her tray to the next man. Jed knew she knew that he would be seeking her in the parlor that

evening, as of old. Nobody cared, not even Buckley, seated in the midst of his gang of huskies. He grinned. He had joined with a yell in the chorus of greeting when Sanders first appeared in the dining room. Jed was fun to him.

It was Saturday, and therefore inevitable that there should be something doing in the doghouse that night. Other nights there might be; on Saturday night it was certain. But Jed this time did not hesitate upon the board sidewalk and look up at the lighted windows of the parlor. He walked resolutely down from the store with his box of candy, as a man who goes reconciled to his fate, and went into the house. Yvonne sat by the marble-topped table, her fingers beating a devil's tattoo upon its cold surface.

She looked up at Sanders without surprise and nodded toward a chair. It was not upon him or his coming that her thoughts were, and the lightnings in her now dark eyes showed that those thoughts were trouble breeders.

She took the candy and put it down without opening it.

"You're here again," she said.

"Yes," agreed Jed. "I wanted to see you, Yvonne."

She laughed, and for an instant softened with the look that always bound him hand and foot.

Then she asked a question that hurt the more because of that look.

"You didn't see Charley Buckley when you came in, did you?"

"No."

"You didn't go into the basement?"

"No, Yvonne."

Her fingers beat more rapidly; a vertical line grew upon her white forehead.

"He said he was coming up to-night."

Sanders felt sure now that there was something in what the man at the Cross River mill had told him. Before she would not have shown any feeling as to whether Slick Buckley came or stayed away.

"Yvonne," said Jed, "don't you go and let what Buckley does make any difference to you."

"Oh!" She flung out her hand in an impatient gesture, as though to sweep away

Jed Sanders and his talk. "You and all the rest of them are alike! You're like a dog with a bone! You growl at all the other dogs because you want the bone for yourself!"

"No," Sanders told her steadily; "you are wrong about me, Yvonne."

Suddenly she flared at him, with a blaze of wrath in her eyes and the corners of her mouth drawing down.

"Prove it, then! Prove it right now! Go down into the doghouse and tell Charley Buckley to come up here! Tell him I want to see him right off."

She knew well enough what she asked, but she didn't care. At best she was putting him under the yoke of a deep humiliation. Sanders wondered where was the real Yvonne, who glowed through the mist of trouble so brightly sometimes.

For a moment he did not make up his mind whether to go or refuse.

"Yvonne, are you going to marry Slick?"

"I didn't say so." She laughed scornfully. "You aren't like the rest of them—oh, no!"

"I'll go," said Sanders, deciding. He stood up. "It seems kind of a bad thing to do, but—maybe—you'll see I want you should be happy."

She had not believed that he would go. He saw that with the last look he had at her face; but she did not try to stop him as he left the room and went, without haste or lingering, down the hall and the stairs.

Before he opened the door he knew that it was a very big night in the doghouse. Song and blasphemy mingled in an undulating roar that met him halfway from the sidewalk; and when he entered the room he stopped to get his bearings.

A man wholly sober needed to step carefully there.

Aaron Pratt, equally imperturbable whether he drank much or little, sat in his armchair at one end like a weary devil presiding over Hades. The long room milled with men, sweating, singing, arguing, and calling upon all the powers of the high gods to prove what they said. Sanders knew intimately the collective mind of the doghouse, although he could neither have written nor said what he knew.

There was nothing mean in such a crowd, drunk or sober, except in the case of lone persons like Slick Buckley. It was not a fighting crowd, but it would fight at the drop of the hat. It preferred to curse in peace and amity, to sing and weep at its own sentimentality, to revel in a false glory of elevation without harm to man or beast. Nevertheless it was mercurial. Death might be a jest, or a joke a tragedy.

Jed stepped around two singers, locked in each other's arms, whose spiked boots alone seemed to hold them upright upon the floor. He avoided, with head turned, a gripping hand that sought to draw him into a trivially mighty argument. Through the haze of smoke and sound he moved toward a corner where Buckley and three other men played poker in comparative silence.

The players nodded greetings. Two of them, being well on in their cups, leered. Buckley frowned. He had been drinking hard, as witnessed the color of his face and the hardness of his eyes, but he was doing what Sanders had seen him do before—going short on his drinks and cheating more and more effectively.

It would not have been according to the code for an onlooker to speak of this. A man was supposed to take care of himself and his money.

Jed sat down beside Buckley, rather close to him, in spite of the unfriendly look of inquiry with which the action was met. He wanted to get a chance, when the attention of the others was diverted by joke or drink or fresh deal, to give his message to Slick in a whisper. It was bad enough to have to carry that word from that girl to this man. He did not want his world to know.

It was not long before the opportunity came. Somebody passed a dipper of hard cider to the poker game, and it was going from hand to hand. The nimble fingers of Buckley had just put the pack of cards down for the next man to cut; they now went into his pocket, drew forth the pearl-handled knife, and snapped out the big blade.

While he waited he pried a splinter from the drygoods box upon which they played, and drew leisurely shavings from it.

Jed leaned forward and touched the coat sleeve of his rival. It was necessary to speak somewhat above a whisper in order to make himself heard at all in that room. Nevertheless his tone was low, and perhaps a little thickened by emotion.

"Slick! Yvonne wants to see you!"

At the touch Buckley had jerked up his head. He stared, hard and scowling, into the face of Sanders. Whether or not he fully understood Jed did not know, but it was certain that he was roused to anger and suspicion.

"What?" he demanded in a tone loud enough to draw the attention of the others at the table. "What's that, Sanders?"

It was too late now to keep the message wholly for Buckley's ears. Everybody understood that there was a certain amount of bad blood between them, and if Sanders had tried to call Slick out of the room at this juncture the drunken mob would have jumped to the conclusion that it was a fight and gone howling after them.

Jed drew back, sitting erect upon his chair, and summoned what dignity he could.

"Yvonne asked me to tell you to come upstairs right off."

This time the words carried even beyond the poker players; even as far as the ears of old Aaron Pratt, who turned in his chair and for an instant allowed a flicker of emotion to pass over his face.

Sanders, superconscious now of all that was going on about him, distinctly heard the word that came from Pratt's lips through the sudden silence.

"Fool!" said Aaron Pratt.

It was this word that broke the momentary silence. Buckley, whose lower jaw had dropped, leaned forward and stared uncertainly at Jed, without speaking. But the other three at the table laughed as one, and the most ribald of them bellowed the sentences that gave shape to succeeding events.

"You got to go, Slick! Her other feller says so!"

A roar of laughter shook the doghouse. Half the room had caught the situation, and the other half was willing to laugh without knowing why.

The lips of Slick Buckley moved, their sound unheard in the bedlam. Sanders, burning but set like a bulldog to the accomplishment of his purpose, gave him eye for eye.

Jed had not so much as the span of a second in which to avoid what came. He saw the fingers of Buckley tighten upon the knife, and instantly a pain darted into his side and seemed to go through and through his thick body.

It was hard to believe that he was stabbed; a knife-thrust from one of his own race was outside the limits of fighting decency as he understood it. He put his hand to his side. It came away red stained, wet. It was true, then. The crowding faces, open mouthed, maudlin, dazed, swayed to his vision. He got upon his feet. Then his knees buckled and he went down to the floor.

For a brief moment the room became mere noise and dancing lights to Sanders. Then a voice that could have called him back from hell reached his ears, and he saw the bright-shirted men press aside to make a path for Yvonne Gonyo. Her cheeks flamed red. Sanders followed her glance and looked upon his enemy again. Buckley was leaning a little heavily upon the box, lips parted. His eyes shifted under the gaze of Yvonne, roved, jerked down to Sanders, and fastened upon the knife. It lay where it had fallen, gleaming guilt in the light.

Yvonne saw it. Then a disturbance from behind pulled her head around for a fraction of a second. She turned back toward the knife. Her foot slid forward and covered it, and she half wheeled so that she was facing toward the front of the room.

The reason for her action came into the range of Jed Sanders's vision. Amos Greenough, the constable, walked through the lane that had grown still wider for him, and glanced down at Sanders. He was a tall, loose-jointed man, unimpressive except for his eyes. They had been known to look down the barrel of a shotgun without so much as a narrowing of the lids.

"Who done it?" he asked quietly.

Of course he did not expect an answer. No man there would have answered that

question. If any one spoke it must be one of the three involved. The river and mill men showed their respect for Amos Greenough by silence, but if a strange officer of the law had asked that question he would have been thrown out into the April mud. Greenough knew whom to arrest on suspicion, if he wanted to go through the farce of arresting any one.

A smirk had grown upon the face of Slick Buckley. Safe, now, with the foot of Yvonne covering the evidence against him. He met the gaze which Greenough let pointedly come to rest upon him.

"Buckley," said the constable, "what do you know about it?"

"Nothing," replied Slick. "I was playing cards and some kind of a fight started over by the stove. I don't know nothing about it at all."

Then out of the infinite store of things unexpected came two words from Yvonne Gonyo.

"He lies!" Her hand swept down as a bird skims the earth and held the knife up within a foot of Greenough's face. "I've got him straight now, thank God! Whose knife is that? What's that but Jed's blood on it?"

Slick Buckley sank against the wall, white faced and groping for a hold upon the scarred plaster. A murmur passed over the room.

Even Greenough drew breath quickly.

Jed Sanders, lying upon the dirt and splinters of the doghouse floor, knew in that moment the purpose for which he had lived. Yvonne was saved by his blood.

The fool had gone his way, condemned of men, on to an end which he had not been able to foresee, but which had saved her whom he loved more than life. Now she was free.

All things were not in vain, as he had thought. Bigger than all of them a purpose ran, firm with the firmness of inviolate good. That good had turned his steps up to Yvonne from the doghouse, and turned them down again to meet the knife of Slick Buckley. He was content.

Yvonne dropped down beside him and lifted his head to her lap. He tried to raise a hand and found himself strangely weak;

but he was able to smile up at her with the smile of victory.

"It's all right," he whispered. "You—won't—marry—him!"

Yvonne had slit down his shirt with the knife that had stabbed him, and now her

fingers sought to locate the wound. When they had made sure where it lay her eyes changed. Into them came the sparkle of twin stars.

"No, Jed," she murmured to him, "but I'll marry you if you want me."

The End of a Perfect Daze

by Marc Edmund Jones



WALTER WAITE stepped from the Twentieth Century Limited in the Grand Central Station with the same feeling with which he had boarded it at the Western beginning of its run. This was the year, and the month, and the week—and now the day, and nearly the hour of his opportunity. Then he turned to his chance traveling companion, to say good-by.

"It has been a real pleasure—" he began.

"Nonsense!" interrupted the other, the older man of the two. "Now that you are in New York if there is anything that John Long Keith can do for you, ever, don't hesitate to call on me. That's my name—in full."

Walter laughed. "The same goes if you happen to be in Milwaukee, only—"

"Only you hope this new deal of yours goes through; whereupon Milwaukee sees you no more."

"Right! Well—"

"If I can be of any help to you," Keith reiterated, "don't be backward."

"I won't," Walter promised.

He looked at his watch. His appointment with "Old Man" Gregson, of the copper interests, was not for an hour and a half. Yet a little thrill found its way up and over and around and through his spine, for it would not be long now before papers would be signed and he would be making all arrangements for his departure to South America, there to be in supreme charge of all the holdings of the copper trust. What a chance it was for a young man!

A chance he had earned, too. For Walter Waite had served his apprenticeship. After his graduation from Boston "Tech" he had spent long months in harness in Montana, in Mexico, in upper Canada and Alaska; and three grim years in Costa Rica where the recent little fracas, not of importance for general comment in the newspapers in the States, had nearly written a "finis" to the very promising career of a young engineer.

Walter laughed now. Idly he looked about at the warm yellow marble and the handsome generous lines of the Grand Central terminal. Just what could he do with himself for an hour and a half? The

barber, perhaps; and a shine—to the virile conqueror of things of the out-of-doors there was little resource in the time-killing devices of a more effeminate civilization.

But there came to mind the principal sacrifice his chosen work had entailed—a lack of friends. He pictured to himself his arrival in the Eastern metropolis under almost any other circumstance. Almost any other line of effort—in which he might have reached an equal degree of success—would have assured him a chain of intimates and acquaintances across the continent. If he were anything but an engineer, dwelling principally upon the outposts of man in the wilds, he would only have to go to the telephone to find a welcoming voice and a cordial invitation, multiplied perhaps a dozen times over.

Even in Milwaukee he had felt keenly alone. For sentiment's sake he had returned to his birthplace upon the termination of his Costa Rica contract. His mother's death and the sudden move of his brother to take the position with the Boatman's Bank in St. Louis had left him without ties, but he had hoped to find some old forgotten associates of boyhood days—

His six weeks in Milwaukee had been spent at the Plankinton; his human contacts had been as casual and ephemeral as the friendship he had just struck up with this Mr. Keith on the Twentieth Century—a friendship that would probably slip easily from his mind, and slip forever, once he sat down at the side of some glass-topped table across from "Old Man" Gregson for the final discussion of his South American contract.

And it was the thought again of the coming conference with the big man downtown that drove any lingering sense of loneliness from his mind. Of course! An hour and a half was hardly enough time for all the things he should do. It would be necessary that he obtain a room at some hotel, a difficult proposition later in the day. There he could leave his bag; there the porter would take the check for his trunk—and it would be just as well that he made sure that his attire was up to all the standards of Wall Street, far from an instinctive thing with the young man of pioneer trails.

He found a room at the Admiral, so that it was not necessary for him to venture out to the street at all. In less than the half-hour of the hour and a half available he was all ready for Rufus Gregson. To kill the remaining time he determined to walk downtown.

"Four miles! One hour! Right!" he told himself.

Parts of the city interested him—the Grand Central Ramp, the Metropolitan Tower; the traffic, the crowds; the sense of immensity in mass rather than individual objects—but by West Fourth Street, half way down, he was disgusted.

"Me for the open," he exclaimed, to no one in particular. "Everything here is too easy. All the wants of man at hand. And I"—he straightened, subconsciously, as he strode along; a boy carrying four hat boxes gaped at him open-mouthed—"I live on problems, real problems."

Precisely at the hour named Walter presented himself in the ornate outer reception room of the handsome offices of the interests he expected to serve for the next four years. Briefly he explained his errand.

In about five minutes a rather small middle-aged gentleman with side whiskers came out. Walter's face fell. Could this be—

"You are Mr. Gregson?" he inquired.

"Oh, no indeed!" The little man smiled tolerantly. "I am Mr. Gregson's confidential secretary."

"But—but I had an appointment with Mr. Gregson!"

"Of course!" The secretary was not to be sidetracked from his own way of accomplishing his errand. "Mr. Gregson suddenly decided to leave for Florida—he had promised Miss Gregson—"

"But I—"

The little man put a hand on his arm. "Do not be impatient, my young friend. Mr. Gregson has all the papers which you are to sign with him, and he is taking the train at three thirty o'clock at the Pennsylvania Station, and he left instructions that you were to ride down to Florida with him, since it will give him a better opportunity to go over everything with him."

"I am to take the three thirty train for

Florida, and meet Mr. Gregson on the train—”

“Exactly. Now—”

But with a mixture of chagrin at this postponement of the interview and excitement at the thought of taking the long ride with one of the biggest financiers in the country, Walter turned on his heel and left, precipitously. Not until he was half way down the elevator did it occur to him that he had turned away abruptly, and that there might have some other detail of the message left by the copper man. Pride kept him from going back.

He hurried on up to the hotel to pack his bag and recheck his trunk; he hardly felt that he should leave it in New York. Vaguely he wondered what he should do with all this extra time on his hands.

Then, in the subway, came an appalling realization. Feverishly he opened his bill-fold, counting his money. He had far short of the amount necessary to purchase a ticket and Pullman to Florida.

He laughed—his first reaction to the situation—realizing that even had he the money he had neglected to learn his destination, whether Jacksonville or Miami or any one of half a dozen other points. Of course it would be easy to phone Mr. Gregson's secretary, but after his precipitous exit from the offices of the copper company he was determined that he would not appeal to them. A matter of pride again.

But where to get the money he needed! He had his check-book at the hotel, and plenty of funds in the bank in Milwaukee. He knew that the hotel would accept a check to put through subject to collection, and wondered if the credit man could be persuaded to wire to the bank to assure them that there were funds to cover the amount of the check, and to accept his identification of himself by letters, initials on his trunk, *et cetera*.

But the credit man at the Admiral was out.

“He will return about quarter to five,” the girl explained.

That would be too late. Walter explained his dilemma. His recital of his trouble gained her sympathy, so that she appealed to the assistant manager, the only

officer to be reached at the moment. He shook his head.

“It's a matter of routine, Mr. Waite. I have no doubt but that we can accommodate you later in the afternoon. But we hold our credit manager, Mr. Ruggles, wholly responsible for advances to guests—I simply cannot go over his head.”

Suddenly Walter remembered his new-found friend of the Twentieth Century, who just that morning had told him to call upon him for any favors. He took out the card, hurried to a telephone booth.

Mr. John Long Keith was out.

It was indefinite. They didn't know when he would return.

With this Walter realized the seriousness of his situation. He left the hotel and began to walk westward on Forty-Second Street, not with any particular destination in mind, but because he was accustomed to thinking best while he walked. Quite oblivious of the crowds he started to cross Fifth Avenue against the wishes of the traffic police, and was stopped abruptly—all without jostling the subject in hand from his mind.

In the theatrical district, at Times Square, he saw that there was only one thing to do, and that was to begin to act upon every suggestion that came to him, without loss of time, until somehow he obtained the needed funds.

In the Longfield Building was a Western Union telegraph office. He stepped in and wrote a message, hurriedly:

Second Ward Savings Bank, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Cannot identify myself here. How can I draw on you for funds? Answer collect.

WALTER WAITE.

“What is your address for the answer?” asked the girl behind the counter.

“Can't I wait here, and get you to rush it?”

She looked at him curiously, and as a bit of reciprocity he studied her. He noticed that her hands were very small and competent. She was small herself, but he liked her businesslike attire, a plain linen waist with a little lace collar, and the simple manner in which she dressed her hair. She collected the fee for the message and then

turned back and busied herself getting it rushed for him. After a moment she returned to the counter.

"That should take at least an hour, at the quickest," she said.

"But I can wait here?"

"Of course!"

There was something in her tone that caught his attention. She had read the message, of course. Did she think it odd for a full grown man to be willing to sit around a telegraph office for an hour; or did she think it a fruitless move on his part—

Of course she probably thought nothing about it, but the chain of thought gave him another idea. Quickly he wrote out another message:

Plankinton, Milwaukee, Wis.

Caught here unexpected, need for funds.
Can you wire me fifty dollars? I will mail my check to cover. Answer collect.

WALTER WAITE.

While he had only been at the Plankinton three weeks he had considered it his home; he had left some few of his belongings in the hotel's care; he had rather made friends with the manager and the head clerk. All at once he was aware that the girl behind the counter again looked at him curiously.

"I can wait for that answer, also?" he asked.

"You may," she said; but her tones now were cold.

Actually he did not wait in the office, but he strolled out into the arcade, had his shoes shined again, and nervously watched his time. At last the answers came, one on top of the other:

Put in a check for collection any New York bank or hotel.

SECOND WARD SAVINGS BANK.

And he had known that!

You have an iron-bound, brass-plated crust.

DURANT.

Ouch! Durant was the man at the Plankinton he had thought his friend!

Then he glanced up and saw that the girl behind the counter was smiling. She had freckles, but the smile revealed even

teeth and dimples—and the amusement in her eyes nettled him.

"It isn't a funny matter," he protested.

She took the fee for the two collect messages, then indicated the second telegram, pointing to the phrase: "iron-bound brass-plated crust." "That's exactly what I thought when you sent the one to the hotel." She giggled. "I didn't think any one would tell you, out and out."

"Didn't you ever get caught, short of money, in a strange city?" he inquired earnestly, not exactly understanding why he sought to justify himself.

"No, I didn't. And if I traveled much I'd carry plenty."

"It isn't always safe to carry a lot in cash."

"All right!" She started to turn away. "Your funds out in Milwaukee seem to be very safe. You have little prospect of spending them."

Checking any impulse to explain further to the girl he hurried out again into the lobby of the Longfield Building. Next the shoe-shining parlor were public telephones, with operators. In a forlorn hope he called up John Long Keith, and found that he still was out.

What to do? Like a flash came the thought of his brother. Of course! There had never been a great degree of intimacy between the boys, due principally to a twelve years' difference in age—then Walter had been impatient, during his college period, with the questions and interests of George; and the younger fellow had never developed the usual awed admiration for an older brother. But George would help him, surely.

As Walter hurried back into the telegraph office the girl looked up with surprise, but did not say anything. He wrote out his message:

GEORGE WAITE,

Boatman's Bank,

St. Louis, Missouri:

Rush me by wire fifty dollars. Answer collect. Hurry. Will mail you check to-day.

WALTER.

The girl behind the counter was deliberate. "You wish this message rushed, also?"

He glanced up at the clock. Five minutes after one! Barely two full hours left. And he had had no lunch, and only a scant breakfast on the train. And he had a bag to pack and a trunk to get out of his room—

"Please! Pretty please!" he exclaimed.

She smiled. "For saying it that nicely I will. And if I suggest that you walk around the block while you're waiting, because you made me awfully nervous before—"

"I'll grab a bit of lunch," he said.

Unexpectedly quick came the answer, for it was ready for him after a very hurried trip across to the Childs on the other side of the Times Building.

George Waite home, seriously ill—influenza.
BOATMAN'S BANK.

Walter Waite suddenly felt every hope ebb away. Was he to lose the great opportunity of his life through his aversion to carrying large sums of money in cash; to his foolish move in taking it for granted he would have no trouble cashing checks in New York City? Of course he could appeal to Mr. Gregson's secretary, but that might make as bad an impression on the copper magnate as missing the three thirty train.

"Seeing that you can't raise the money—"

He started, realizing that the girl was speaking. And it seemed to him that there was a friendly light in two very large brown eyes.

"Seeing that you can't raise any money," she repeated, "isn't there something you can do to achieve the same purpose without money?"

He looked at her blankly. Then an idea flashed to him so very quickly that he turned and left without even thanking her for her interest.

Of course! He did not possess the forty odd dollars he needed for the railroad fare and Pullman for the whole trip, but he could purchase a ticket and berth on the same train for a distance as great as his money would take him. He could have his conference and perhaps close the whole deal without revealing his dilemma. At the

least he would conceal his awkward situation for the early and vital beginning of negotiations.

Now, for the first time, he realized suddenly that he did not know what Rufus Gregson looked like, or how he would find him on the train. But this was a minor trouble, and largely due to the fact that he had not obtained more information from the little confidential secretary.

He hurried to his hotel, and there an additional thought came to him. The overcoat he wore, a big English gray tweed purchased in Vancouver, had been rather heavy all day, and he was going South. In his trunk was a lighter brown coat, domestic, which would serve very well. Then he had drawing instruments, and a very fine pair of binoculars, and a number of other items in his trunk, including a full dress suit which had traveled about as much as its owner, and had never been worn except upon the initial occasion for which it had been bought—his mother's first visit to the opera in the Chicago Auditorium. All these, he knew, could be converted into cash at a pawnbroker's. Perhaps he could scrape together enough to buy the full ticket after all.

He had something less than two hours left now, and so he telephoned for the porter and ordered a taxi. The trunk and bag were ready for the train, of course, but the gray overcoat, the full dress suit, the various other items he intended to pawn, looked foolish in his arms; so he impressed a bellboy who followed him into the lobby equally ill at ease with the load.

"My bill, please?" he asked, at the proper cage.

"One day; five dollars—you had no telephones?" Suddenly the girl looked puzzled. "You just came in this morning, didn't you, Mr. Waite? There may be no charge at all for the room in that case. If you can wait until—"

But people were looking oddly at the bellboy with the armful of things to be pawned, and Walter felt too conspicuous to wait. Moreover time was valuable, very valuable, and it was not until he was safely in his taxi that he realized that the five dollars paid out to the hotel might be just

the amount he would be short in order to get the Florida ticket.

"Drive me to a pawnshop!" he instructed the taxi driver.

Then he settled back to examine his finances. He had arrived in New York with about twenty-five dollars, which he had been sure would have been sufficient for his immediate needs upon arrival. But he had been generous with the red-caps and porters and bootblacks, true to the traditions of the open West and South. He could not remember his tips and expenditures, but he had in addition to the small change in his pocket just one new uncreased ten-dollar bill. He needed to raise about thirty dollars.

"I'll make it," he told himself, audibly; the habit of the man of the solitudes. "They say bad luck comes in bunches, but so does good luck, and I live on problems—real problems, and this appointment with 'Old Man' Gregson is too good luck to be associated with any real misfortune."

The drawing instruments, binoculars, several technical books of tables used by engineers—all the items except the overcoat and dress suit—proved easy to pawn at the first shop on Third Avenue not far above Forty-Second Street.

"I'll gif you twenty dollars for der lot," wheezed Whiskers.

"Make it thirty dollars and take the overcoat and suit," pleaded Walter.

"*Nein!* I can mit der clothes do nothin'. Der moths und der bugs—"

"All right! Give me the twenty, and hurry."

Walter took the ticket. With apologies the pawnbroker presented a twenty-dollar bill—he had no smaller change—

Walter crammed the bill into his pocket and ordered his driver to hunt up other shops. The taxi kept on up Third Avenue, but there seemed to be few pawnshops, and after another refusal to accept wearing apparel, at One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth the driver suggested that they turn back to try lower Third, or that they go over to the West Side, on Sixth, or Seventh Avenues.

"Keep in the neighborhood of the Pennsylvania Station," ordered Walter, watching his diminishing time.

On Seventh Avenue they found the proper places, but only after very considerable cruising about.

"Six dollars," dispassionately offered the man behind the counter.

"Can't you make it ten?" urged Walter.

The pawnbroker turned over the dress coat. "Padded shoulders! It is ten years out of style." He fingered the coat. "This is an English coat, fine and warm, but don't look like much; too 'stylish' for a poor man to buy"—quizzically—"and maybe you don't come back. Six dollars!"

"All right! Hurry!"

At the Pennsylvania Station he unloaded his trunk and left the bag with a red cap ordering him to stand by the trunk until he could get his ticket. Then he looked at the taxi meter for the first time, and gasped. Six dollars and twenty cents! He glanced at his watch. Quarter to three. Just about an hour had been spent raising money on his spare effects; about a quarter of the amount raised went to the taxi driver.

But there was no further time to lose. He had to get his ticket and Pullman; then return here to check his trunk. Panting, he presented himself at the ticket window.

"Railroad and Pullman to Florida on the three thirty."

"Whereabouts in Florida?"

"Uh, Jacksonville, I guess." That was the nearest point.

"Fare will be thirty-six fifty-five and the Pullman—"

Surreptitiously Walter counted his money. He had had to break his ten to pay the taxi driver, and of course had tipped him. He had the twenty, and four something, and six—

"Wait, please!" He colored, foolishly.

"Make it railroad and Pullman to Washington, D. C., on that train." He slipped the twenty-dollar bill through the grating.

The ticket seller looked at him oddly; then glanced at the twenty. After the one glance he picked it up and examined it. Then he passed it back.

"You have heard about the counterfeit twenties in circulation?"

"Uh, is that one?"

"It is. If I thought—"

Walter flushed. "I know where I got it."

If I had time—" he checked himself instead, and put down the rest of his money. "Give me a ticket and seat to Philadelphia." Walter was actually conscious that his actions were very foolish, not to say suspicious.

The agent shook his head. "Not on that train. That's the Florida Special, and you'll have to go at least as far as Wilmington, Delaware, to ride on it. But"—a rather unexpected sympathetic impulse—"if you know where you got that phoney twenty why don't you go back and make them disgorge? You have three quarters of an hour, and there's plenty space to-day."

Harassed, Walter took the suggestion. With chagrin he remembered his own feeling of superiority over the big city as he had walked downtown to keep the original appointment with Old Man Gregson. He had felt that the effeminate affairs of the metropolis could never upset one who had so successfully conquered some of the uttermost wilds of the globe. And yet here he was, as flustered as a woman, displaying the intelligence of a five-year-old. Walter Waite, civil engineer! Bah!

On his way to get another taxi the idea came to him to try again to reach John Long Keith, his friend of the morning. The telephones were just across the floor from the ticket window. He called the number. And then it seemed that his luck had turned.

"Good!" There was cordiality in the other man's voice, after Walter had explained. "You got me just in time, for I'm leaving for Westchester, and—you have just ten minutes to get to my bank"—a pause—"let's see! I haven't my check book downtown, but I tell you what I'll do. You take a taxi over to the Thirteenth National Bank, on Fifth Avenue near Thirty-First, and ask for Mr. Spruce—he's one of the paying tellers. I know him very well and I'll phone him, describing you, and telling him to honor your check for fifty dollars on the—"

"Second Ward Savings Bank of Milwaukee," supplied Walter.

"Hurry, now," directed Keith. "The bank closes at three, and here's worlds of

luck to you on your trip to Florida with your copper man."

Walter hurried. In the bank the watchman directed him to the proper window. He stopped first to write out his check; then he asked for Mr. Spruce.

"Mr. Spruce has just left," was the surprising intelligence. "Called away unexpectedly."

"Mr. John Long Keith was to have telephoned him about—" Walter began.

"Oh!" The teller picked up a slip. "You are Mr. Walter Waite?"

Walter nodded.

The teller read the slip twice, then examined him closely. All at once Walter had a premonition that something was wrong; he felt the blood leave his face. Certainly Keith had not failed him. The voice over the phone had been cordial. And the teller had known his name.

The teller left the cage to consult with some other men in the adjoining compartment. Both studied him with polite but nevertheless careful deliberation. Then the first man returned.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Waite—this is rather embarrassing, but—"

"But—" Walter's voice echoed feebly.

"The description does not fit you at all."

"I don't understand!"

"In the first place you are described as wearing a very noticeably English great-coat, light gray in color, and—"

"I changed to this brown one because I'm trying to go South with a man, to Florida, on the three thirty train." Walter felt his hands grow clammy. After all, to miss out now—

"Then you are described as very ruddy," the teller went on. "You look almost anæmic, if I may be pardoned—"

"That's worry!" ejaculated Walter. "I've just spent five of the most strenuous hours of my life, all in this hectic effort to raise enough money to buy a railroad ticket, so that I can clinch the job that means the make or break of my future."

"I appreciate that," the teller soothed; "but what you are asking of the bank is very unusual. And then"—looking at the slip again—"your eyes are described as brown, when they are obviously dark blue,

and"—a shrug—"that's all the description Mr. Keith gave Mr. Spruce."

"Isn't"—Walter was grasping at straws—"it is possible for a man to be mistaken in the color of a person's eyes, isn't it?"

"Surely, especially when blue eyes are very dark."

"Then can't you—"

"I'm sorry!" The teller looked at his watch. "It's past closing time, and while I don't doubt that you are Mr. Waite, yet the whole proceedings is rather irregular, and Mr. Spruce is not here. It is his responsibility, and I don't feel I can cash the check for him when, as I say, the description does not fit in any particular. It's the function of a bank always to 'play safe.' I might telephone Mr. Keith, but—"

"He has left his office for the day," Walter explained, forlornly.

"Then there is nothing I can do." This with finality.

After a moment Walter squared his shoulders. Twenty-five minutes left, but he was not ready to quit. The pawnbroker who had passed the counterfeit bill upon him! With the taxi waiting outside the bank—

The pawnbroker was out. The boy didn't know when he would return. Perhaps old Whiskers had known the bill was bad and had expected this call.

Walter groaned. Nineteen minutes! He sank his pride and telephoned the office of Rufus Gregson. The secretary was out. No one else knew anything of the movements of Mr. Gregson, said the operator.

Seventeen minutes! He ordered the taxi driver to make the Pennsylvania Station in a rush. Then came another idea, and he stopped at the only Western Union office he knew, in the Longfield Building. At the least he would die trying, so to speak.

The little girl with the big brown eyes was still behind the counter, and she looked at him searchingly as he scrawled a message, feverishly. He had just thought of Osgood, splendid old Osgood, who had shared his troubles in Costa Rica. Osgood was with Pearce & Burns, engineers, Detroit—

"Will you tell me," suddenly demanded the girl, "what all this rush for money

means. You seem to be riding about in taxis, yet—"

Walter caught, somehow, the idea that her question was sympathetic. Was it possible that she had felt she had come to know him in the brief hour or so he had waited around? There had been no conversation—

On impulse he explained. The three thirty train. The one opportunity of a lifetime. She looked at the clock.

"You don't expect money to be wired to you in time for you to catch a train at the Pennsylvania Station in twelve minutes?"

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly. Of course it was hopeless.

"Quick!" She pushed the message back to him. "You've got to hurry, and hurry some. Make out your check and I'll cash it."

"You'll—" Dazed non-realization!

"Speed!" She put a warm and impelling little hand on his wrist. "No questions! Write! And make out the check to"—hesitating—"cash."

He couldn't thank her, and to his shame didn't try. The taxi obligingly speeded a little bit on the way to the station. There they sold him the ticket to Jacksonville, but told him he would have to buy his Pullman on the train—the diagrams of the sleeping cars had gone down five minutes before.

His trunk and bag were still out in the taxi runway; he couldn't desert them. The red cap had given up, but he managed to check his trunk, stopping explanations that it was far too late to get it on this train.

Then with the bag in hand he sprinted across the concourse.

"You've missed the train by only half a minute," explained the gateman.

After first feelings of chagrin and bitter disappointment came a new sensation of disgust. The little girl! Why had he allowed himself to accept her generous offer. She was real stuff. Even if he never landed Gregson—

Gesticulating rather wildly for a florid and stout man, another would-be passenger came puffing up, followed by two red caps, one with bags the other with golf sticks.

"Damn!" ejaculated the new arrival. "And a young engineer's on that train, waiting to talk business with me, and—oh, hell!"

"You—you're not Rufus Gregson!" gasped Walter.

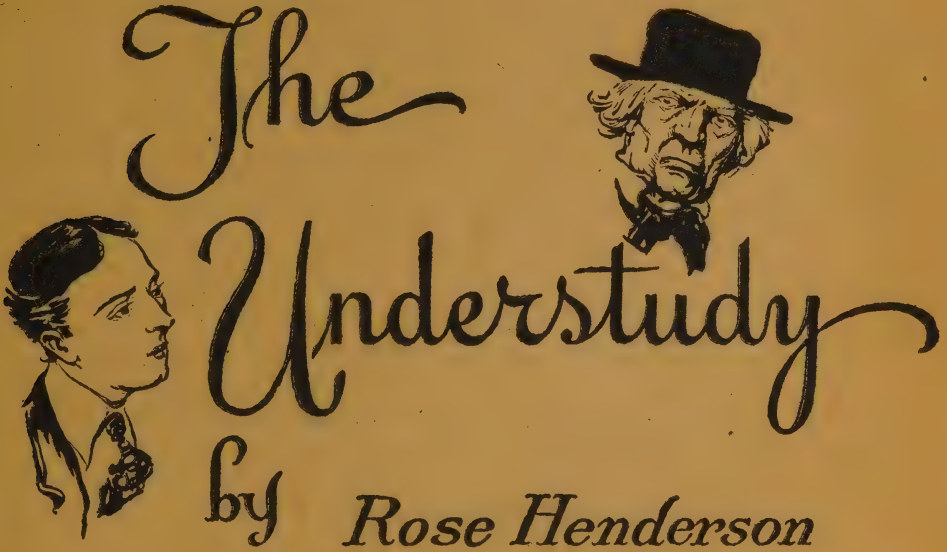
A little chap with side whiskers came up

the stairs from the now empty platform. Rufus Gregson's confidential secretary!

"Oh," he exclaimed. "You both missed it!" Then he extended a little envelope to Walter. "Here's your transportation. You left the office so quickly that I had to come down to the train to catch you."

The Understudy

by *Rose Henderson*



WHILE his fellow players were collecting their baggage and taking taxis to the Chamberlain Hotel, Dick Morley, of the "Peter Fagan" theatrical company, walked a half dozen blocks through the down-town Des Moines streets to a dingy chop-house with its sign lettered across the windows. He noticed that the lower half of a B was still gone from the sign, like a vast broken tooth. He recognized the same stocky head waiter who used to wink tolerantly at noisy college gangs with whom Dick had consorted less than two years before. The same cracked corner of a mirror marked his place at the back of the grill-room.

Dick sat down and glanced furtively about, relieved not to discover a familiar face at the tables near him. And there was no flicker of recognition in Jake's placid countenance.

During his year and a half on the stage Dick had thought often of the possibility of some time playing the old college town, but he had dreamed always of returning

in a prominent rôle. The local city papers had made much of the fact that he had landed a juvenile lead his first season in New York. The college weekly had devoted the greater part of several issues to him, and his numerous friends had sent notes of congratulation which had been by no means the least enjoyable phase of his success.

But Dick was already a convincing illustration of the fact that there are violent ups and downs in the acting profession. This year he was on the road with "Peter Fagan," playing the six-line part of a bashful lover and understudying the juvenile lead. For himself, he was not discouraged. The hardships of one-night stands were still an amusing novelty. In two months he knew the play from beginning to end. He was popular with the company. And he was confident that if Barnett, the healthy juvenile lead, would ever get sick, he, the submerged understudy, could show what there really was in the part. It was a big part.

Moreover, he was writing a play that David Murchison, the famous old star who played *Peter Fagan*, declared was not half bad as a beginning. Murchison was a genius in character work, and Dick felt it a privilege to be associated with the great actor.

Murchison directed his own company and was a relentless coach. Dick had learned more from his director than he had imagined there was to be learned, two years ago. But his friends would not know of these compensations. They would remember his leading parts in triumphant amateur productions. They would recall the reports of his flashy Broadway hit, and they would pity and speculate. Ever since he had known that the Des Moines booking was a certainty, the thought of appearing there had hung upon him like a weight.

The clock above the cluttered desk in the chop-house lobby pointed to eleven. The November sun shone palely through the veil of soft coal soot on the chop-house windows. Dick dallied miserably over his coffee and rolls. Out at the university, he reflected, the fellows he had known as sophomores and freshmen would be listening to lectures or hanging around the quad until the noon hour.

At various times since he left, Dick had been desperately homesick for the old scenes, for the class fellowship, the glee club, for Chet Palmer, his particular pal. Chet wrote poetry and Dick recited it, and they both were given to dreaming vast and airy dreams of the future.

Chet was now dramatic critic on the morning paper. He would soon be going up to the hotel to arrange for an interview with Murchison and to hunt for Dick, and in his review of the play he would do his honest utmost to say something complimentary about the sickeningly small part assigned on the program to Richard Morley. Chet would have tact enough not to overdo the thing. That was one consolation. But the pitiful anti-climax of it all nagged Morley relentlessly. And yet he would soon have to face them, to laugh and talk and say how good it was to be back.

The lobby clock pointed to eleven-twenty. The familiar discords of a blind

street player jangled at the open window. Dick wished vaguely that he could lurk for the next twelve hours in the dingy obscurity of the grill room. He wondered how it would seem to be a placid head waiter instead of a struggling, inconsequential actor returned to the scenes of his early ambitions. Dick felt unbelievably old and sad and shaken as he paid his check, got his bag, and walked slowly up Sixth Avenue, expecting every minute to hear a familiar hail. He wished that he had gone along with the rest of the company. His solitary breakfast at the old chophouse had not nerved him for the coming ordeal. Rather it had called up a new host of disconcerting memories.

II.

THEY were waiting for him in the hotel lobby, Chet and a half dozen other fellows, and the reality was much less ghastly than his anticipations had been. Dick was able to manage a bit of the gently farcical humor that he had developed early in life and which had forecast his future as a comedian. He burlesqued his few lines grotesquely as he described the part to his friends. And he declared seriously that it was worth it all just for the daily contact with a man like David Murchison. This last suggestion impressed his auditors. They agreed that it must be great to breathe the same air, eat at the same table, and sometimes ride in the same compartment with a celebrated actor.

But the afternoon wore on less successfully. There was a faculty tea which he was not adroit enough to escape. There were telephone calls and messages from people he was glad to hear from and from others whom he knew hardly at all. Acquaintances questioned him closely and curiously about the "life" he was "leading." Others spoke reprovingly when he tried to laugh away the insignificance of his present rôle.

"Don't forget that we're expecting big things of you," they reminded him.

"A former student of mine," beamed the professor of public speaking, introducing Dick to a determined society matron who

was intent on finding out all about "stage life."

They were obviously disappointed because he had so little to tell. They nagged him for details, wounded him with well-meant admonitions and feeble congratulations. By night Dick's nerves, usually an unknown quantity, were taut and twingeing.

Dick was not a snob. He loved the old town, the old school, the friends and associations of his most buoyantly sensitive years. It was his caring that pressed the iron into his flesh. For he was very young, after all, and proud young dreams came back to mock him with their seeming futility. What had he done in two years? What would he ever do? He had been confident, just as these friends of his were. Just how foolishly confident he was able to realize now that he had seen a little of such men as Murchison. Without hard work or time or experience, he had planned to ascend deftly and uninterruptedly to the enticing top of the ladder.

To be sure, he had talked vaguely about effort. But he hadn't known what real effort meant. He, and they, imagined that because he could walk clumsily through an amateur production of a masterpiece he was ripe for the high rewards of the profession. At least, enough of them seemed to think this to make an oppressively overwhelming majority.

He wished they could see Murchison at work on a new production, day after day, night after night, drilling, hammering, polishing. Three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock, and still at it! A few hours' rest and back again. Work, work, work! Despair, tears, weariness! And yet, after all, a dogged, indomitable satisfaction in standing up to the thing. And then, the rare white moments of triumph! Even a little, obscure triumph that a lot of people might sneer at. And a final, proprietary interest in "the whole damned show." He had felt something of it all at college. But results there had been cobblestone rather than mosaic.

To be sure, there was the lighter, easier sort of thing he had done a season ago. But Dick Morley would not be satisfied to

do that forever. Thanks to the old town, or the college, or to some kind of romantic adventure within him, he must at least try for what he called the real thing. That was one of the reasons why he was with Murchison.

And so he sat in his hotel bedroom and dreaded and feared the fact that, before an audience who would all know his name, he must go on in the smallest part that the play offered. He hated himself for his fear and dread, vowed he would show them some time, and yet could not smother the foolish, prideful misery that swept him. There was a sickening humility as well as a new doubt of himself that his return to the old environment had created. Chet Palmer, he knew, realized the truth of the situation and believed in him. But then Chet was always tranquil and optimistic.

III.

WHILE Dick sat at the hotel, wishing that the night were over, Chet Palmer was interviewing Murchison, or the star was interviewing Chet. The young critic realized that he was doing too much of the talking as soon as Murchison asked about Dick. But the kindly encouragement in the actor's eyes was irresistible. In a few minutes Chet had forgotten the questions he meant to ask and was deep in a discussion of Dick's latent genius, his skill as a writer, his possibilities as an actor, his loyalty as a friend. Before he realized it, he was revealing the eager aspiration of those moonlit nights on the campus, the aching solemnity of a rare, boyish friendship, the high faith and courage of questing youth. A warmth of sympathy filled the fine old face opposite him, a face which had reflected a score of contrasting rôles, which had expressed the whole gamut of human emotions without losing its own distinguished grace.

Chet suddenly became aware that time was passing. He awoke from his beguiling confidence realizing that he had already taken more of the great man's time than he should have done, and that he had nothing he could print as an interview. He stammered an apology and tried to

think of the questions he had intended to ask.

Murchison came to his rescue with a smile. "Wonder if you wouldn't like something they've never printed about me. Something 'exclusive,' you call it, don't you?"

The reporter flushed eagerly.

"I'll tell you a little story about my beginning days, ages ago. I was an under-study. And I had to play my home town in the rôle of a butler who spoke just once. It seems humorous—now. Think you'd like the story?"

Chet beamed his joy and thanks. They sat back in their chairs at the side of the hotel lobby. The actor recounted the experience with whimsical cleverness and a nice appreciation of the dramatic points.

As he rose and shook hands he was serious again, gazing intently into the young man's face.

"I've never given that to the press before," he said, "because I was—well, sensitive about it, I suppose. But you and I have walked together along a very pleasant high road. I don't believe you'll garble the story or hurt me by anything you say. I believe you understand how I'd rather have it told. Thanks, Mr. Palmer. I am delighted to have had this talk with you."

IV.

IN his dressing-room at the theater Dick found a sheaf of roses from his fraternity brothers. He was touched by the tribute, and more touched with gratitude that they had sent them there instead of to the stage during the play. He hoped, he prayed, that nobody would send up any flowers out in front. It would be the last straw of emphasis upon his ignominy. Yet the red roses in a long pasteboard box from a florist he used to patronize suggested the horrible possibility.

Dick realized that he was making a silly mess of his nerves. He sat down and glared at himself in the dressing-table mirror, and with a tremendous effort began to overcome his panic.

"It's for only one night, you nut," he grinned; "and the worst's over."

It was early, but he had been unable to stand the hotel a minute longer. "Only one night," he chattered, gritting his teeth. It was the first time he had known anything like stage fright.

As he got out his make-up box he heard his own name spoken in the next dressing-room. He hated eavesdropping, and was about to find some excuse for calling out, when the speaker's words arrested him with a quick stab of hope. "You see it's his own college town, and it would mean so much to him, just this once."

The voice was Mrs. Devon's, the old character woman whom the whole company loved. In moments of extreme professional pique they might be ready to tear each other's hearts out, all except Mrs. Devon's. Her mellow kindness had shamed more than one jealous intrigue.

But Barnett's voice answered a shade testily. He didn't see why he should hand over the part, just for that. Morley probably didn't want it anyway. Would be scared stiff at the idea.

"Well, I just thought you might not understand the situation," said Mrs. Devon quietly. "I thought you might like to offer him the part."

"Damn him! He knows I'd like it," raged Dick inwardly as he heard the door close and Mrs. Devon walking back along the carpetless hallway. "Mr. Murchison would let me do it, too."

The momentary hope had flushed his face feverishly. He forced his hand to deliberate calm as he daubed on the make-up. "But it's his own business, you nut," he muttered at the clean blond face in the mirror. "His darned own business."

Then he started to his feet at a quick rap on his door. "Come in," he shrilled. But it was Murchison, not Barnett, who opened it. Dick stammered something gaspingly. He could never remember just what he said.

"Good evening, Morley. Feeling pretty fit?" asked the old actor.

"Y-yes," bleated Dick.

"I'm not quite up to par myself. Indigestion. Bad food, I guess." Murchison crumpled into a chair and looked up at the young man pathetically.

"I—I'm most awfully sorry, Mr. Murchison. Can't I—do something?"

"I was just wondering if you wouldn't do *Peter Fagan* for me. I remember that you read the part uncommonly well at some of the rehearsals when I was studying the play as a whole. Uncommonly well."

Dick's mouth dropped slowly open.

"I—I've heard you rehearsing my lines since. You—know the whole part, don't you?"

"Yes—I—know—the whole—p—play," gasped Dick in a kind of dazed whisper.

"Well, it's early. Suppose you try a few speeches for me. Just to see how it goes."

"But—Mr. Murchison, you're—you're just doing this—for me—"

"Doin' what?" snapped the old actor. "Gettin' this darned stomach ache?"

"No—but—I—you—"

"Well, go to it, Morley. I'm not sick enough to worry about, but I—I'm indisposed to play the part unless I have to. And it's early."

Dick came out of his funk under the steely gaze of the actor-manager, at the lash of a whip in the great, keen eyes. He launched into the speeches of *Peter Fagan* with a kind of singing ecstasy which was strangely self-possessed and controlled. The part had always appealed to him. Now, with the hypnotic personality of Murchison before him, he seemed actually to step into the quaint old character.

"Good!"

"Not so fast—"

"A little more pep."

"That's it."

The terse comments heartened him, spurred him on. The director gave him the cues and he took up the speeches without hesitation. They jumped to the third act and ran over the climax.

"You can do it, my boy," said the old actor. "And I'll see you through. If you should get lost I'll put you on. Remember that. Now for the make-up."

Dick's voice shook and his eyes filled as he tried to stammer his thanks. *

"You—you mustn't tire yourself," he protested.

"The pain's better. Quite gone, in fact. But I want to see you do it. I was young once myself. And now—you shall be old!"

He was painting lines into Dick's slim face, thinning his mouth, creasing his forehead, while Dick panted with excitement and vowed his eternal gratitude and devotion. They rushed to the star's dressing-room for the gray wig and the loose-fitting clothes of *Peter Fagan*.

"What—what about my part?" grinned Dick.

"What do you mean, your part? Oh, I'll tell Barnett to do that. It won't conflict with his rôle. Think he may enjoy doing it, eh?"

They rushed up-stage as the orchestra finished the overture. And then the assistant director walked out in front of the curtain and announced that he regretted very much to have to tell them that Mr. Murchison had been suffering from a sudden, though not a serious illness, and that the understudy, Mr. Richard Morley, would play the rôle of *Peter Fagan*.

There was a moment of silence, then a storm of applause. A ripple of laughter swept the house at the incongruity of its response, but the assistant director smiled and bowed understandingly, and the applause flashed out again, to hush abruptly at the ascent of the curtain.

V

It was well for Dick Morley that he was the sort of person who could rise to a crisis, that he enjoyed the tension of it. Back in his college days he could cut class cheerfully, refuse to study for weeks at a time, then settle down and grind for exams with real interest. He could put whole books into his head in a night's cramming. He could become oblivious to everything in the world except French verbs or medieval history. And he liked the excitement of a tremendous task.

The old spell of concentration was on him as he took the stage with the hesitant steps of *Peter Fagan*. And the emotional reaction from his fit of hectic gloom was like wine in his veins. There was a half-

eerie knowingness about the character that had always intrigued him. It was the elfish wistfulness that haunts the very young or the very old.

Dick felt an instinctive kinship with this elusive, gnome-like wisdom, a wisdom tinged with the mocking grace of laughter. He was only half aware of the surging applause, of the college fellows yelling at the close of the first act. He answered curtain calls in a kind of dim rapture. He waited off-stage unconscious of everything except the players in their parts and the occasional hand of Murchison on his shoulder.

The poetic truth of the play thrilled him, knit him closer in sympathy with the star whom he adored. Poignant desires, born of moonlit campus walks, of classroom and library hours, of vague, boyhood dreams awoke and sang within him. Above the glowing tumult of his imagination sat the calm artist, conscious of the color, the pattern of the part he was playing. And so the shining spirit became articulate. His

acting, of course, was an almost automatic reflection of the rôle as he had seen Murchison do it, night after night. Yet the flame of his eager youth burned through the lines and made them his own.

It was over at last. David Murchison had gone out with him to bow genially as the house rose to its feet and cheered the final curtain. The whole cast had stopped to congratulate him, Barnett, a little shame-faced. Dick was back again in his dressing-room, mopping the wrinkles of *Peter Fagan* from his smooth forehead.

As the sooty express train pulled out of town the next morning, Dick Morley watched the shabby suburban streets flash past in the November sunshine; and his eyes glowed with a brooding eagerness.

He still heard, in fancy, the old college yells, with his name spelled, over and over. The click of the rails became a jubilant chorus, and the suburban houses faded away into a gleaming ribbon of dreams.

A PLEA FOR PAINLESS POETRY

I HATE the introspective bards
 Who slice emotions while we wait;
 They place our souls on index cards
 And catalogue each hectic state;
 They poetize in words that mean
 A thousand things, but nothing clear;
 With vague nuance they stir my spleen
 And drive my thoughts to cheese and beer.

The other day in reckless mood
 I read a piece called "Threnody";
 A Chinese laundry ticket would
 Have yielded far more sense to me.
 I gathered that a cloud had spied
 A mumbling brick whose soul was pink;
 Perhaps, thought I, the poet tried
 But knew not *where* to get a drink.

I shun the worldly super-wise
 Who chloroform my griefs and joys.
 I shy at pretty verse that pries
 Into my neighbor's psychic poise;
 Give me the lilting catch that stirs
 My blood to life and warms the heart;
 And, though the highbrow clan demurs,
 I'll take a chance and call it Art.

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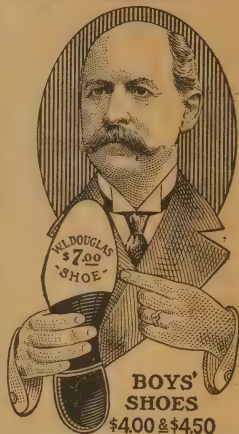
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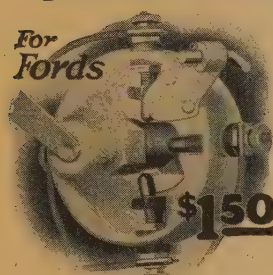
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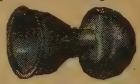
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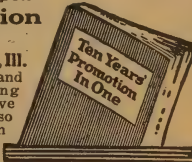
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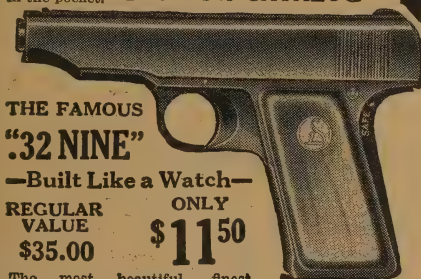


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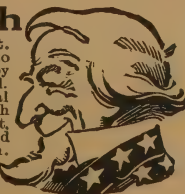
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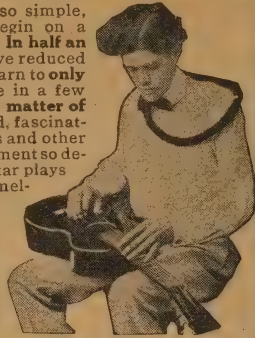
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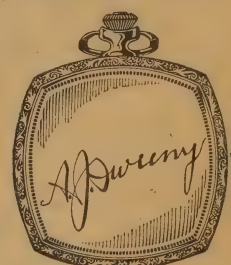
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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



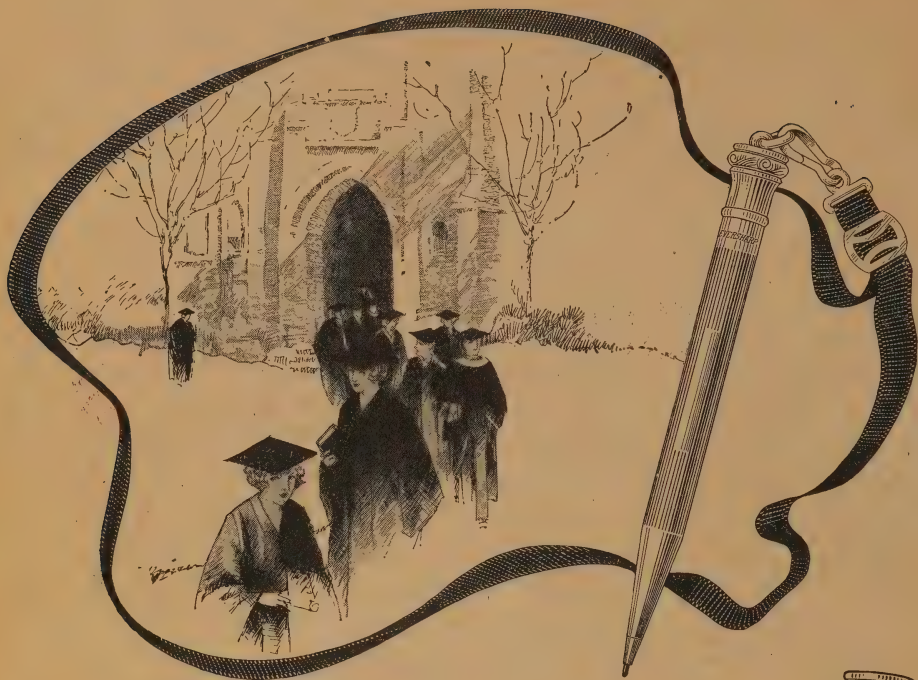
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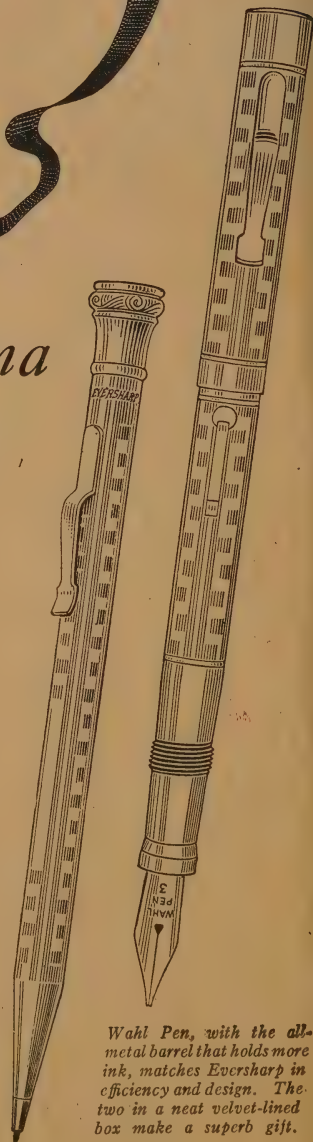
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Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department
is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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	Line Rate	Combination Line Rate
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June 17th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close May 20th

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INSYDE TYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. **AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO.**, B-101 Cincinnati, Ohio.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. Soaps, Extracts, Perfumes, Toilet Goods. Experience unnecessary. **Carnation Co.**, 200 Olive, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS, \$60 TO \$200 A WEEK. Free Samples. Gold-Sign Letters for Store and Office Windows. Anyone can do it. Big demand. Liberal offer to general agents. **Metallic Letter Co.**, 431H N. Clark St., Chicago.

AGENTS—150% PROFIT Handling Household, store and office necessity; repeater; free sample and exclusive territory to producers. **CHOO DE PRODUCTS**, 318-C Fullerton Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS to sell two new Auto Clocks, that on account of reasonable price, fine appearance, fully guaranteed, makes this the most wonderful article you could possibly handle. **F. W. JANSEN CLOCK CO.**, 215 W. Randolph, Chicago.

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. \$100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. **HOLMES RUBBER CO.**, 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. **Harper Brush Works**, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. **Madison Mills**, 503 Broadway, New York.

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AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. **Ho-Ro Co.**, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. **Acme Letter Co.**, 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. **Laccasian Co.**, Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our New System Specialty Candy Factories anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillyer Ragsdale**, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

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WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—\$75.00 to \$150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. **Mr. Arthur B. Allison**, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.

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Responsible firm offers big opportunity; wonderful invention: plumbing unnecessary; thousands enthusiastic users; representatives wanted; exclusive territory; experience unnecessary; free sales helps. Write today. **ROBINSON HOUSEHOLD MFG. CO.**, Dept. A-5, Factories Building, Toledo, Ohio.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



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The Gusher Part I by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "Treasures of Tantalus," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN HATER.

FOR a stalwart young six-footer like Mert Dibble to turn his back deliberately on a crippled old man seemed a particularly brutal thing. It was peculiarly surprising conduct for one in the uniform of a sergeant in the United States army, whose insignia indicated an honorable discharge after conspicuous service overseas. Add to that the fact that Sergeant Dibble himself had within the hour been discharged from the military hospital after long weeks of suffering, and his present conduct seemed the more inexplicable.

As he entered the dingy little railroad station Mert had not failed to note the pain-racked face of the man who was vainly trying to raise himself with the aid of his crutches from the bench in the waiting room. For a moment the stern blue eyes of the young ex-soldier softened in pity. He took an impulsive step forward; the cripple brought back vividly to his mind his own

idolized invalid father, dead now these five years. The memory of his father was the one soft spot in Mert Dibble's heart.

But his momentary impulse to help the old man had died as quickly as it had arisen; for at that instant a sweet-faced young woman turned away from the ticket window and noted the cripple's effort with alarm. She rushed over to him.

"Wait, father," she called anxiously. "I'll get some one to help you."

As she spoke she glanced about her inquiringly. Mert was the only man near at hand. Her eyes caught his, and she started toward him. But on the instant the eyes of the young soldier hardened again. He frowned and turned abruptly away.

The girl looked perplexed and rebuffed. She turned back to her father and stood watching for some more likely assistance, while Dibble went surlily over to the ticket window.

Thus occupied, he did not notice the equally strange actions of the inconspicuous

ous middle-aged man who followed him into the station. He had failed, too, to note that the stranger had trailed him all the way from the hospital. This obscure person seemed as heartlessly indifferent to the plight of the cripple as Dibble had been. He walked by close to the couple, gave the girl a searching look, then jerked his head toward the young man in uniform at the ticket window, and walked on without so much as a glance at the old man, who had looked up hopefully but seemed not to notice the pantomime.

The girl looked after the stranger, an expression almost of fear in her eyes; then she glanced once more doubtfully at Mert, who had now secured his ticket and was starting for the train shed. A moment she stood irresolute; then she braced herself as if for an ordeal and hurried after the ex-sergeant.

Mert Dibble had nearly reached the door to the train shed when some one touched him on the arm. A soft, troubled voice said:

"I beg your pardon, but would you be willing to help my father to the train? I'm not strong enough to support him if he should start to fall."

Mert turned abruptly, as though the lady had struck him. He frowned into the troubled, shy eyes of the girl. They were soft, appealing brown eyes. It was a most appealing smile, too, with which she instantly veiled the troubled look. But neither eyes nor smile appealed to Mert Dibble. In fact, it had been the presence of this young woman which had deterred him from helping the cripple, though it would have made any normal young man the more eager to do so.

Mert Dibble, in one respect, was not a normal young man. Due to his peculiarly unhappy boyhood experience, he was a woman hater of the most pronounced type. The two ruling passions of his life were devotion to the memory of his dead father and hatred of all women on account of the acts of one woman who had caused his father's ruin and death.

Now, as he looked first at the girl and then at the cripple, who was once more trying to rise by himself, there raged within

him a war between these two passions. The struggle deepened the forbidding scowl on his lean, pallid face.

The girl shrank back a little and said apologetically:

"I asked you because you are a soldier, and I knew I could count on you."

But the old man settled the struggle at this juncture by slipping and pitching forward. He would have fallen to the floor had not Dibble dashed over and caught him.

Mert was no longer looking at the girl, no longer thinking of her. For the time being he was back five years in the old farmhouse in Goar Valley, to which he was now returning; for the time being he was again assisting the faltering steps of his own invalid father. He was now all tender solicitude for the helpless stranger. The girl sensed the fact that she had suddenly become a discordant element, and effaced herself by following well in the rear as they moved slowly across the train shed.

No one but the girl noticed Dibble's mysterious trailer, who was standing unostentatiously near the gate. As she passed him the stranger favored her with an encouraging grin, and again she shrank away from him almost imperceptibly.

Settled in his seat in the train, the old man thanked his escort profusely. He was a man of fine features and polished address. Mert saw that in health he must have been a splendid figure of a man—a circumstance that reminded him the more of his own once stalwart father. But the gentle brown eyes under their snow-white brows recalled suddenly the duplicates of those eyes which had so disconcerted him a few minutes before; and then, willy-nilly, he found himself face to face once more with that other pair of brown eyes.

"Thomas Worthington is my name, sir," the father was saying. "This is my daughter, Miss Violet Worthington. If you are going on this train, we'd be glad to have you turn over this seat in front and sit with us."

But Mert was instantly in a panic again. He most ungraciously blurted out something about having a friend in the smoker, and bolted, barely acknowledging the intro-

duction. Nevertheless, as he fled he carried with him, to his disgust, a mental picture of a gentle face and a pair of hurt brown eyes, and he was not quite pleased with himself.

"She's nothing but a kid," he thought reproachfully, "and her old man's certainly sick. She might need help on the train."

He thought momentarily of going back and saying his friend had missed the train, but didn't know just how to do it gracefully; so he gave it up, and spent the time on the way to Senabaugua trying not to think of the pair in the car back of him.

Instead he turned his mind to the problems that faced him when he reached his old home, and from that he fell to dreaming of his boyhood days on the old Goar Valley farm. They had been happy days at first. He was an only child. His mother had died at his birth. His father, big, gay, affectionate, had taken the place of mother, brothers, and sisters so thoroughly that he had never felt the lack. Indeed, up to his tenth year he had seen so little of women that he regarded them as a race apart and was intensely shy of them.

The only one with whom he had much to do was Simple Martha, a middle-aged half-wit who lived in the Dibble tenant house and came in for a little while each day to do the cooking and keep the place clean. He was afraid of her and kept out of her way as much as possible; not unnaturally, as a little chap he regarded her as typical of her sex.

It occurred to Mert now that at last reports from the trustees of his father's estate Simple Martha was still the caretaker of the old farmhouse and had been living alone there since he left home after his father's death. He would have to get rid of her the first thing; he would have no woman around the place.

Mert had been ten years old when the change came over their happy home with the mysterious arrival of another woman in the household. She had come to the Dibble farm seeking work. What tale of hard luck she told his big-hearted, unsophisticated father Mert never quite knew, but her story, together with a certain super-

ficial beauty, had won his father's sympathies, and he installed her as housekeeper.

But from the start, Mert could see as he looked back now, she had been scheming to get control of his father's property. Lish Dibble had been simply a comfortably well-off farmer. However, Goar Valley was suspected of having under its soil rich oil deposits, and any farm might prove a bonanza once drilling had begun.

The trickiness of the oil prospectors and the ruin they had wrought over the hills from Goar Valley by their wildcat speculations in wells that had turned out dry holes had united the conservative farmers against them, even to the extent of organizing a band of Night Riders who dealt in summary fashion with all attempts at drilling. Goar Valley for a generation had enjoyed the unique reputation of being a region that had fought bitterly against having wealth thrust upon it.

The woman's opportunity came when Lish Dibble had been crippled for life in the fight between the Night Riders and the oil prospectors who had won a tentative foothold on one of the neighboring farms. As he looked back now, Mert believed from little things he had recalled that this fight had been brought about largely through the woman's treachery.

Be that as it may, she had nursed her employer back to such health as he ever possessed again and married him. From that time until just before his death she had estranged the father and his young son. She had carried on a continuous campaign, first by persuasion, then by threats and constant nagging, to get her husband to sell out to the oil men. Finally, five years before, in the midst of one of her violent outbreaks, Lish Dibble's weak heart had failed him and he had dropped dead.

Over his father's dead body that day the grief-stricken boy had muttered:

"I hate all women! I'll never have anything to do with another woman as long as I live!"

And now as the train slowed up for his station he repeated that solemn oath with a man's vigor.

He was coming back to Goar Valley now

to fulfill his father's dying wish that he preserve the old farm home as his grandfather had laid it out and built it, and take up the leadership of the losing fight against what they believed meant destruction of their beloved valley.

By now he had almost forgotten the disturbing young woman and her invalid father whom he had encountered in the station. He was still engrossed with the work ahead of him when he got off the train.

Then, to his consternation, as he alighted he glanced back and saw the girl and her father getting off also. In his confusion he hurried away without looking back again.

So it happened that he did not see the man who had trailed him from the hospital to the station, and who had evidently come out on the same train. It is not likely he would have thought anything of it if he had, for he had been quite unaware of being followed. This unobtrusive stranger alighted, too, and sought out the girl when she had left her father for a moment to look after their baggage.

"Well, did you get anywhere?" he demanded of the girl.

Again there was a momentary fright in her eyes as she looked at the man; but she conquered it swiftly and tried to smile.

"No, of course not," she replied. "You didn't tell me you were sending me after a woman hater. Why, he's a young bear!"

"Cheer up, girl!" the man answered easily. "I've got his number. He isn't a born woman hater. He only thinks he is. That kind falls hardest for a skirt when he does fall. Just keep after him. Remember what you're doing it for."

And he jerked his head significantly toward the forlorn father who sat waiting on a bench on the station platform.

"Well, I'll do anything I can," the girl agreed.

CHAPTER II.

WHO OWNED DIBBLE FARM?

THE first familiar figure Mert Dibble saw as he left the train was Firewater Joe, the erratic Indian who, ever since Mert could remember, had worked for his

father on the old farm at such time as the spirit moved him to work at all. He stood waiting for the son of his old employer with countenance as wooden and emotionless as that of the traditional cigar-store emblem, except for his smoldering black eyes, his only medium of expression, which now glowed their greeting for the white boy to whom he had been devotedly attached.

Joe was an impressive figure despite the fact that a tattered and none too clean cotton shirt and overalls were his only clothing. Though he was well into middle age, he showed none of the signs of early decline so common among savage races. He was not over medium height, but his straight, sinewy slenderness made him seem towering. His wiry black hair falling to his shoulders showed no signs of gray. Years of devotion to moonshine whisky, to which he owed his title, had left no visible ravages.

Joe's regular home was a disreputable rough pine bachelor shack on the edge of the reservation which lay outside Goar Valley and beyond the town of Senabaugua. But after the crippling of Mert's father Joe had shown his devotion to the half-grown boy by attaching himself permanently to the Dibble farm, knocking together a flimsy shack in the woods by the river and living there. He had remained ever since, attending the farm as Simple Martha had attended the house.

"Hello, Joe!" Mert exclaimed heartily, the somberness vanishing from his face for a moment. "Gosh, I'm glad to see you!"

"How do, Mert?" Joe replied without change of expression. "Mr. Beecham he say you come, so I fetchum canoe to take you home."

"Thanks. I'll be with you in about half an hour. I'll find you down at the river. I must see Mr. Beecham first."

Mert turned down the dusty village street and a half a block away entered the office of Charles Beecham, the village lawyer, a lanky elderly individual with a nasal drawl and a square-trimmed red beard rapidly turning gray, who had been appointed by the court to act as trustee to the mysteriously tangled Dibble estate.

"Well, Mr. Beecham," Mert said after the older man had welcomed him heartily and inquired after his health, "I'm on my way back to the old place, but I ain't got any idea whether it belongs to me or how long I'll be allowed to stay there. Have ye learned anything since ye wrote last?"

"Wal, yes, Mert. I got a nibble at last. It only makes the mystery a little deeper. But it's the first hint we've had that your precious stepmother was still alive since she beat it so suddenly the day before your father died. I got this letter from Flowerville day before yesterday. It speaks fer itself."

The letter was from a Flowerville attorney purporting to represent Mrs. Elisha Dibble, Mert's stepmother, stating that his client had something of mutual interest to discuss with representatives of the Dibble estate and would like to arrange a meeting, providing he could be assured that any charges pending against her in connection with her husband's death and the disappearance of his will be not pressed.

"Ye see, Mert, it looks like they thought we had more on her than we really got. We better not go off half cocked by grantin' immunity till we see if there's any possibility that we may have something we've overlooked. That letter sounds like guilty conscience. Now, suppose we refresh our memories as to just what happened at the time of your father's death and what we know about those wills."

To Mert the recalling of the incidents of that summer day five years before, when he was a boy of sixteen, was acutely painful even now. His stepmother had been in an unusually ugly mood that day. Simple Martha was ill, and she had drafted Mert to help her about the house. Lish Dibble had hobbled out on his crutches to look over the plowing Firewater Joe was doing in the field next the house.

His old heart trouble had threatened him, and Joe had been obliged to help him back. Joe, instead of returning directly to work, had evidently taken a drink from the flask he usually had in his hip pocket, and settled down under the shadow of the house for a brief nap, as was his wont. At any rate, he was a witness of what followed.

After a few minutes Mert's father seemed to be breathing easier. His stepmother, scolding her husband volubly for not staying indoors, had gone upstairs for something. Then his father had got Mert to help him over to the old oak secretary and had unlocked a drawer and taken out a packet of papers.

"Mert," he had said, "I'm goin' to leave you soon fer good. I want to show you where to find my will when I'm gone. Fer a time, Mert, I didn't treat ye right. She made me think ye'd turned against me. But I know now who was with me an' who was against me. I made it right with ye, Mert. This will leaves everything to you except her dower rights. I want ye to keep the old place as it is, the way yer granddad built it an' I kept it. Of course, times change, an' I ain't bound ye to anything; but I hope ye'll always live here."

Neither of them had heard the woman come down the stairs again. Before either could prevent her she had snatched the packet containing the will. The cripple had struggled to his feet and grappled with her. Mert had joined in. In the struggle the paper fell to the floor. The next moment Lish Dibble had suddenly collapsed and fallen dead.

At that Firewater Joe had appeared and nearly choked the woman to death before Mert could prevent it. Then Mrs. Dibble had turned on them in a fury, ordering them both out of the house. She declared that she had her husband's latest will, leaving everything to her.

Mert had contradicted her, telling her his father had just shown him a will leaving it to him. Mert further declared he had seen her strike his father and accused her of killing him. Joe had corroborated that. Then while they were trying in vain to restore his father she had disappeared from the house.

Lish Dibble's will, over which they had fought, had disappeared also from the floor where Mert had seen it fall. Neither woman nor will had been seen since. Strangely enough, too, if the other will in her favor, of which she boasted, existed, the woman never made any effort to probate it.

There was some evidence that such a

will existed, whether or not it had been superseded by another in Mert's favor. It had not been drawn up or witnessed by any local person, but Mert remembered a year or two before that two strangers called one day, and after a session with his father and stepmother in the sitting room had gone, leaving a typewritten document which his stepmother had carefully put away.

Mert had tried to eavesdrop under the window, but that was Joe's favorite spot for a noon nap, and he was just waking up from one. Joe swore later that he had listened at the window and heard the draft of the will read, leaving the farm to the wife.

As for any later will, the lawyer who did all of Lish Dibble's business had died just before his client and left no such record in his office.

Before the coroner's jury Mert had made his charge that his father had died from the effects of his stepmother's assault, but the autopsy disclosed no cause of death but heart failure, and the charge was not sustained.

The district attorney, however, did issue a warrant for her arrest on the charge of conspiracy to steal and destroy her husband's will. But she had never been found. Anyhow, the official considered the evidence rather dubious. The court had finally ruled that, pending the finding of one or the other of the wills, the estate should be administered by a trustee for the benefit of Mert, subject to the payment of the widow's dower right. That trusteeship still held.

"I can't figure out from any of that, Mert, where we could hold your stepmother on anything," Beecham concluded, when they had finished reviewing the case. "It's about as I remember it. Of course, before we decide anything I'll get access to the records from the district attorney and advise with him before taking any action. Any murder charge is out of the question. As for her stealing your father's will, we ain't got any real evidence that he ever made such a will. You didn't get a good look at the document, and you got only his word for it, which wouldn't hold in law, considerin' his condition at the

time. On the other hand, if she had a will why didn't she probate it? We might as well waive any of our doubtful rights to prosecute, and let her come on and perhaps clear up the mystery. You'd feel more secure to know for sure you're going to have a home of your own. I'll take it up and let you know in a day or two."

Mert left him, and presently was being paddled by Indian Joe down the familiar watercourse of the Senabaugua River past one well-remembered scene after another. Around a bend in the deep gorge half a mile above town they swung into Goar Valley. Ahead of them were rich farms lying along the flat alluvial land extending a scant half mile each side of the river to the steep hemlock hills that shot up some five hundred feet above the valley floor. The valley was a little over five miles long, cut off abruptly at each end by the closing in of the hills, the river entering and leaving through deep, narrow gorges. It was a big, green-rimmed elliptical bowl cracked at each end.

In his boyhood, perched on the arm of the old red rocker beside the stove in the corner of the dining room, his head against his father's shoulder, Mert had listened many times to the history of this little valley between the hemlock hills. His grandfather had come among the first permanent settlers. The only inhabitants they found were a half dozen families of white squatters of the same family stock, from whom the valley had taken the name of Goar. They were a closely intermarried, degenerate tribe, and had become known in Mert's day as "Hookfingers," because of a peculiar tendency among the members of the tribe to be born with grotesquely misshapen hands.

Driven into the hills by the thrifty pioneers, the Hookfingers had squatted about in ragged clearings in tumbledown shanties, scraping up precarious livings by trapping and hunting, shady barter, and positive outlawry. They had frequently been made tools by the high-handed oil prospectors in their efforts to get a foothold in the valley.

The thirty-year war between the oil prospectors and the farmers had begun soon after the newly opened oil-fields fifty miles

to the south of them began spreading northward. Ugly derricks like unkempt windmill towers soon were dotting the forests and farm lands in every direction and with their spread went wave on wave of money madness bearing with them some sudden fortunes, but more often the flotsam and jetsam of disappointed hopes and wrecked lives.

Just across the ridge of hills that skirted the valley on the south this tide of sudden fortune and disillusion had run its course with more than its usual havoc. The region had been one of prosperous farms in the hands of thrifty resident owners when the wave struck. The first prospectors were crooks. They bought oil rights on a single farm and drilled a well that for a few weeks showed a paying flow. That was enough. The countryside went wild over night. A multitude of adventures rushed in from the cities. A straggling new city of tents and shanties sprang up. Men sold their farms at inflated figures and invested the proceeds in the stocks of fake oil companies or mortgaged them to the limit of their boom values and started drilling for themselves. A forest of derricks appeared. Growing crops were neglected and trampled down by the horde of fortune-hunters.

Then the first well ran out. The others, without exception, turned out dry holes. The boom collapsed. The shanty town was deserted. The clever promoters took their fat winnings to other fields, leaving the former landowners and the rank and file of camp-followers ruined.

While the boom across the hills was at its height, one of the old Goar Valley settlers had succumbed and sunk all his property in a dry well. Many of his neighbors had been impoverished by buying worthless oil stock.

So, faced by the fate of the men across the hills and the ruin of some of their own number, the farmers of Goar Valley had come to the conclusion that all oil profiteers were crooks. They swore together that no other oil well should ever be sunk within their hill barricade. And they had bound their sons to that oath.

But there were many tantalizing signs here and there that under the fertile soil of

Goar Valley might be rich oil deposits that would pay well for the drilling. Wells sent down for water a scant fifty feet sometimes yielded a trickle of oil or a flow of natural gas sufficient to light and heat the farmhouse.

These signs had not escaped the notice of oil prospectors, big and little, honest and otherwise. Every effort had been made from time to time to induce one farmer after another to sell his place or his oil rights or become a partner in a drilling venture. But they had no success. The farmers believed all oil men crooks. If any farmer showed signs of weakening he was waited on by a committee of neighbors and made to see his folly.

One by one these stern pioneers died and those of the new generation often proved more lenient. There came a time when one of these sons refused to listen to reason and stood on his rights as an individual to do what he would with his own. Drilling for oil was begun.

Then the Night Riders came into existence, made up of a selected and secret group of men still true to the oath of their fathers. The derrick and drill were wrecked and the drillers driven from the valley in tar and feathers. A complacent and friendly sheriff failed to bring any action against the Night Riders and the identity of the band's members never was definitely known. The oil men retaliated, however, as was generally believed, but never definitely proved in court, by inciting the Hookfingers of the hills under the crafty leadership of Sam Goar, head of the tribe, to a continuous series of depredations against the valley farms. The result was as planned, that every now and then some younger heir of one of the farms, tired of being a victim of lawlessness, would sell out and another attempt at oil-drilling would be made, only to be thwarted again by the determined Night Riders.

But Mert, while he had been convalescing in the hospital, had received several disquieting letters from old family friends in the valley indicating that the oil men had revived their interest in Goar Valley now that the war was over. More disquieting still was the indication that among the

younger generation the old spirit of opposition to the will-o'-the-wisp of sudden fortune had died out. Indeed, there was to be a meeting of farmers in the near future to be addressed by a promoter from Flowerville who aimed to form a local company to exploit the oil rights.

As the canoe glided smoothly around the bends of the river revealing vista after vista of level farms and prosperous-looking farmhouses, Mert pictured to himself the landscape marred by ugly derricks, the fields dug up to lay pipe lines, the old homes sold by their money-mad owners, the farms abandoned to laborers' shanty towns. It was an unlovely picture and steeled him in his purpose to fight its consummation to the finish.

They rounded the last bend before Dible farm should come in sight and were opposite the sloping lawns of the farmhouse next theirs, owned by the widow of Henry Flanders. An automobile had just swung into the yard and was discharging its passengers, a slender young woman and a white-haired man who was helped slowly and carefully from the car and led toward the house on a pair of crutches. Even at that distance Mert had no difficulty in recognizing them as his acquaintances of the train, Thomas Worthington and his daughter Violet.

"Mis' Flanders's hired man, he tell me she take boarders this summer, young woman and sick father," Joe volunteered sociably.

Mert groaned. Was he never to get rid of this disturbing young woman with the appealing brown eyes?

CHAPTER III.

THE PERSISTENT SEX.

A FEW minutes later Joe drove the canoe up to the landing across the river road from his house. Mert stepped out and then stood on the little wharf, gazing with a full heart and brimming eyes at the old home. The early afternoon sun dappled the uncut grass of the yard. The ancient trumpet vine, as luxuriant as ever, festooned the posts of the broad

front veranda and climbed to the eaves of the low-rambling roof. As far as his eye could discern time had not changed the old place since the day his father died.

It seemed now that his father might come out and hail him at any moment, not the pitiful cripple of those later years, but the hearty older brother he had known as a child. The spirit of his father seemed everywhere about.

He crossed the road in a dream and went up the gravel drive to the side door that now stood open leading into the dining room. He mounted the narrow steps and peered in. Opposite him was the old oak secretary and in front of it that same chair in which his father had sat that last day when he had started to show him his will.

Now Mert seemed to see him as he was then and hear him say again: "I want ye to keep the old place as it is, the way yer granddad built it an' I kept it."

Everything about him was clean and in perfect order. Despite her lack of wits Simple Martha was a good housekeeper. He heard her step in the kitchen and suddenly remembered that his first job was to get rid of her. He would have no woman about his house. He was perfectly able to take care of himself.

"Might's well get that off my hands first as last," he muttered, and strode into the kitchen.

Martha was very deaf and was unaware of his approach till he was towering diffidently over her. Confronted with the business of ousting this faithful old servitor for no cause whatever excepting her sex, Mert suddenly found himself, ridiculously enough, feeling the same fear of her that he had known as a small boy.

Simple Martha was very little changed to Mert's eye since he could first remember. At sixty she was the same squat figure in an habitual stooping posture as in the early forties. Her broad face unlined by thought, and her expressionless, pale-blue, staring eyes looked as they always had. Only her thin hair, knotted tightly at the top of her head, showed the passage of time. He remembered it when it was iron-gray. Now it was nearly snow-white.

When she caught sight of Mert, she gave

a squeal of delight and waddled toward him like an overgrown hen, grabbing his unenthusiastic hand and pumping it hard.

"Back agin, Mert! Back agin! Wal, Martha's glad. Got yer dinner waitin'. Set right down here in the kitchen where it's handiest."

Mert braced himself and went at his task stubbornly.

"All right, Martha. You can go then. You got your home in the little old tenant house. It's yours as long as you want it. I can take care of myself now. Good-by. Let me know what I owe you up to date."

Martha had cupped her hand to her ear and looked a little puzzled. But in a moment her face brightened with understanding.

"Yes, of course. Of course this is my home. Thank you, Mert. I'll repay ye by takin' good care o' ye. I kep' the house nice whilst ye was away. The Lord has pervided a home fer ol' Martha an' he's pervided Martha fer you."

"The Lord didn't take it up with me none," Mert grumbled in an undertone.

But the old woman was serenely placing the dinner on the table. After a moment of hesitation he decided to put off the disagreeable business till he could make her understand what he meant. Besides, he was hungry from his ride, and Martha's dinner smelled most appetizing. Already she was heaping his plate at one end of the kitchen table. He sat down without more ado and began eating. But in a moment he stopped. Martha was filling a plate for herself as well and preparing to eat with him at the other end of the table. With a snort of disgust, Mert pushed back his chair. He wouldn't eat with any woman, least of all with this unappetizing-looking creature.

"I'll eat in the dining room," he shouted as she started to sit down.

"What say, Mert? Didn't I give ye enough meat?"

"Yes! Yes! No! I mean it ain't that. I'm going to eat in the dining room after this, I say."

He pointed at the open door of that room.

"Oh! Want the dining room door shut?" she squeaked, starting for it.

In desperation, Mert picked up his plate, knife, and fork and brushed past her. He slammed his plate down with a force that threatened even that heavy ware and began eating furiously and self-consciously. And the next moment Martha was planted opposite him with her own plate.

"Lan' sakes!" she grumbled. "Why didn't ye say ye wanted to eat in the dinin' room?"

Now Mert was furious. He snatched up his paraphernalia a second time, dashed out to the side steps, sat down with his plate in his lap and again attacked his food. And once more he found Martha beside him, wide-eyed with amazement, but valiantly adjusting her plate to her fat knees. This time he gave up. After a few hasty mouthfuls he abandoned dinner for the day.

"Beats all what queer notions folks gits in the army!" she muttered as he left her.

That was only the beginning of Mert's bedevilment by the well-meaning Martha. Like all outdoor men Mert was anything but neat in the house. The reaction from his enforced military orderliness exaggerated his natural tendency. He never thought of cleaning his feet when he came into the house. He always dropped his hat where it happened to be handiest. He was forever disarranging the chairs which Martha kept in such strict military conformation, for Martha was as painfully orderly as Mert was the other way.

Whenever he came in it was a signal for Martha to get broom and dustpan and brush up after him. Then she would hang up his hat and coat where they belonged and stand about in the offing ready to swoop down and rearrange any furniture he might get out of place. It was driving Mert to the point of insanity by the end of two days. He endured it only by staying out of the house as much as possible. Yet he could not get his courage up to the point of making another attempt at ousting the simple-minded creature.

But Simple Martha was not the only woman who was making life miserable for the woman-hater. It soon became evident to him that Miss Worthington, the city boarder at the Flanders house, whom he had treated so cavalierly on the train, was bent

on ignoring his conduct and developing the acquaintance. You may be sure she got no encouragement from Mert.

Her first maneuver was to stroll slowly past the Dibble home in the early evening, either alone or with the younger Flanders girl. Mert noticed them first one evening when he was sitting on the front veranda after supper.

The girls bowed, and Miss Worthington paused and said: "Good evening, Mr. Dibble. Don't you remember meeting me on the train the other day?"

Mert grunted something, arose hastily and retreated into the house. He heard the suppressed giggles of the Flanders girl following him.

After that he was careful not to be in evidence in the evening. Surreptitiously keeping watch out the front window several evenings, however, convinced him that the girl was systematically trying to attract his attention, and whereas he had heretofore simply included her in his general hatred of her sex, he now resented her very particularly.

Several days later while he was clearing brush in the east woodlot he came suddenly upon her picking violets on a grassy knoll. She saw him before he could retreat.

"How do you do?" she exclaimed in apparent confusion, favoring him with her most appealing smile, which proved even less appealing to Mert than on former occasions. "I hope you don't mind my trespassing on your violet bed."

"It's all right," Mert stammered, his voice and manner plainly indicating that it was all wrong, and started promptly to retrace his steps.

"Oh, Mr. Dibble," she called after him. "My father would very much like to have you call on him some evening. He often speaks of how kind you were to him on the train that day. He suffers a great deal and is very lonesome. It would be a great kindness if you would drop in and talk to him once in a while."

Mert had turned toward her reluctantly as she spoke. Now when she mentioned her unfortunate father there was a pathetic expression in her brown eyes that appealed momentarily to the young farmer. The

fleeting thought passed through his mind that perhaps her efforts to attract his attention had been entirely in her sick father's behalf. He recalled the figure of the gentle invalid on the train, and side by side with him, the memory of his own father. For an instant the feeling of shame at his conduct when he had rebuffed the girl recurred to him. But he repressed it at once, and muttering something about being pretty busy, but would try to drop in some evening. He turned away, and this time she made no effort to detain him.

The thought of the helpless, lonesome invalid stuck in his mind, however. He fell asleep that night thinking about him and resolving that he would call on him some evening when he was sure the daughter was not around.

The chance came a few evenings later. There was a church social and lawn festival being held at one of the farmhouses down the valley. Mert saw the Flanders girl and Violet Worthington drive by on the way to it. Slipping on his army uniform, which he still wore on the rare occasions when he appeared in anything but his rough farm clothes, he walked over to the Flanders place and spent a pleasant evening with the sufferer. He came away full of sympathy and liking for the old gentleman. Aside from constantly reminding him of his dead father, the man of culture appealed to something fine within the rough exterior of Mert Dibble. He had been drawn out of his morose self more than ever before in years. And though he was not quite conscious of it his dislike for the daughter was a little mitigated by pity.

But the next evening Miss Worthington unwittingly lost the ground she had gained. Mert was just finishing supper, postponed until Martha had finished hers, so as to avoid eating with her, when he heard voices outside and looked out to see Miss Worthington and Miss Flanders approaching the steps, evidently bent on making a call.

Mert's only possible avenue of escape without being caught was the stairway back of him. He took it. From the landing above he heard the girls knock, and Simple Martha, who had been in the kitchen when he fled, finally heard and went to the door.

Mary Flanders introduced Miss Worthington to Martha, who was at once all a-flutter with hospitality.

"Miss Worthington's going to be with us all summer and I wanted to have her meet our neighbors."

"I've met Mr. Dibble," the other girl added, "and if he's home I want to thank him for giving father such a pleasant evening. It did him a lot of good."

"Wal, now, Mert was here minute ago. He musta gone to the barn to help Joe finish the chores. You set down an' I'll call him."

She shrieked his name in vain at the back door.

"You jest stay a while," she reported. "He's probably gone back in the lot fer somethin'. He'll be in any minute."

So they settled down and exchanged such remarks with Martha as they could make her hear, and in between visited between themselves, giggling over *sotto voce* comments on Simple Martha's peculiarities.

It was getting late, and duties at the barn must be attended to. So in desperation Mert finally went to a window overlooking the porch roof and shinned down a porch pillar. He made his way to the barn and finished his chores, but when he returned cautiously to the house he still heard in the sitting-room the voices of the girls, punctuated now and then by Simple Martha's shrill comments.

It had been a hard day with Mert in the fields. He was dead tired and longed to get to bed. But nothing would induce him to run the gantlet of his callers. So he dropped into the tall grass under the window where he would be able to note the girls' departure.

But his grassy bed was soft and the warm evening breeze very soothing. Twice he sat up and shook himself to prevent drowsiness overcoming him. Finally the combination of weariness and comfort and the drone of conversation was too much for him. He went sound asleep. Once or twice he roused up a little, but not enough to remember where he was. He was under the impression that he was comfortably tucked up in his bed.

Suddenly he sat up broad awake. Some-

thing had aroused him; what he could not make out. He looked up at the window. The light was out and all was quiet within. Evidently the callers had gone and Martha had gone to bed. Then he realized that the moon that was high in the sky when he first lay down had set. There was a suspicious grayness over the hemlock hills in the east. He had slept nearly all night.

As he sat there, still unmoving and trying to readjust himself to this surprising discovery, he heard twigs crackling over in the woodlot just across the fence, then stealthy receding steps.

"Who's there?" Mert demanded.

The steps ceased and he got no answer, but absolute silence. That response indicated a human intruder. Mert jumped up, vaulted over the fence and plunged into the underbrush in the direction from which the sound had come.

At that the steps were renewed. Now they went crashing away through the thicket in a broad run. Mert followed. Across the woodlot he ran, bumping into trees in the darkness, his face whipped by twigs and low branches, stumbling, falling, righting himself and rushing on, apparently neither gaining nor losing on the fugitive.

At the farther corner of the woodlot he reached the rail fence separating it from the river road. He leaped over it just in time to see in the half light of dawn a man jump into a car that had been parked without lights by the roadside. The engine whirled, the powerful car leaped up into the road and was off at full speed before Mert could get within a dozen feet of it. Not too soon, however, for Mert to note the type of car. It was a racing model of an unusual design, and even in that light he made out its peculiar features so clearly that he knew he would recognize it if he saw it again.

CHAPTER IV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

FRUSTRATED in the pursuit of the mysterious marauder, Mert turned thoughtfully back to the house, puzzling over what it could mean. His first

notion when he started the chase was that it was one of the prowling Hookfingers who were given to minor depredations like chicken-stealing or robbing grain and potato bins. But the flight in the car made that unlikely. Those improvident squatters didn't drive powerful motor-cars.

It was useless to investigate until daylight, however, so he turned his attention to the more pressing problem of how to get into the house without revealing to Simple Martha the fact that he had slept out overnight. That might be difficult, inasmuch as it was her invariable practice to lock carefully all doors and downstairs windows at night.

He considered the possibility of climbing back by way of the veranda rail, and then he noticed that the sitting-room window, the one under which he had slept, was wide open. Without stopping to find the reason for this unusual circumstance, he took advantage of it by climbing in and getting another hour of sleep before beginning the day. He did not forget before entering to wipe his feet off carefully so that he should not reveal his secret to the sensitive eyes of his housekeeper by leaving mud tracks across the sitting-room.

Nevertheless, when he came down in the morning just after Martha he found her already hurrying fussily into that room with her ever active broom and dust-pan. Mert followed her curiously and saw across the old Brussels carpet well-defined foot-prints of black muck unmistakably from the woodlot and smaller than his own by several sizes. He made no reply to Martha's grumblings as she plied her broom, but followed the trail of mud back across the sitting-room into the dining room and direct to the old oak secretary where his father had kept his papers, most of which were there much as he had left them.

A glance showed him that the lock of the secretary had been broken. He opened it and found the papers within in confusion. Nothing was gone as far as he could discover after careful survey, but everything had been thoroughly overhauled as if by some one making a search for something he could not find. There was nothing else about the house disturbed.

Naturally taciturn, Mert made no mention of this incident to any one else, but for days he puzzled over the mystery. Then other happenings came along and drove this partly from his mind.

He was cultivating in the corn field next to the east meadow one afternoon when he saw two men come out of the woodlot and across the meadow in his direction. Their actions were so strange and their appearance so unusual that he paused and watched them curiously. One was an elderly man in the garments of an old-fashioned country preacher, long black coat, white tie and broad-brimmed black felt hat. He had a fat smug face and reminded Mert of the patent medicine vendor he had once seen operating in the village from the tail of a cart.

The other man was young and dapper, dressed in the latest mode, "a danged city dude," Mert decided. He was close to the older man's side, listening to an elaborate rigmarole, being carried on by him.

That pompous, parsonlike person held out at arm's length and horizontal to the ground, a forked stick. This he carried slowly back and forth across the pasture several times, his companion at his side and the eyes of both men glued to the forked stick. Neither seemed to have seen the young man watching across the fence.

Suddenly when they were near the fence they stopped with a joint exclamation of delight. The forked stick had turned in the older man's hand and pointed to the earth, tines down. Then the pair simultaneously looked across the fence and seemed to see Mert for the first time.

"I say, young man," exclaimed the city man excitedly. "Who owns this place?"

Mert stiffened. He resented being called "young man" in that fashion.

"Merton Dibble owns this farm," he replied coldly—regardless of the fact that he wasn't sure of it—and turned to continue his monotonous progress down the long green rows. These men were acting foolishly. They might be lunatics escaped from the State Asylum beyond Senabaugua.

"Just a moment," interrupted the city man. "Is Mr. Dibble around? We must see him at once."

"You c'n see him by lookin' at me. I'm him."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Well, may I go up to your house with you where we can go over some papers and do a little figuring. I have something important to take up with you."

Mert was about to refuse, but curiosity got the better of him. He decided to go with them. While he was hitching his old horse to the fence the man with the forked stick made a little mound of stones to mark the spot toward which the mysterious rod had pointed.

"My dear Haslip," he proclaimed sonorously. "You start your drill on that spot, and we will strike fortune beyond the dreams of avarice both for ourselves and for the good young man who owns these rich acres. It'll be a gusher, or my name isn't Gantry."

Mert saw the light now. These were two of the hated oil men.

"Yes, Mr. Dibble," the man Haslip was saying. "I congratulate you on having under your land an invaluable deposit of oil. We're from the Flowerville Oil Development Company. This is no gamble. It's a sure thing. You've heard, no doubt, of the wand test for oil. Of course in the hands of most people it is a fraud, but Prof. Gantry here has worked it out scientifically. He has been with us for years making tests mainly in the Southwestern fields, and he has never been in error yet. Our best paying gushers have all been located by him."

"Now he has just discovered a rich deposit under your pasture lot. We will make you a liberal arrangement, paying down a good sum and a royalty on all oil produced. In case of failure we will agree to repair all damage done by our drilling and leave your farm unharmed. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

They were nearing the house now, but Mert stopped short.

"If that's your game you're wastin' your breath," he announced positively. "I'm not goin' to sell my farm or any oil rights, and they ain't a mite o' use your talkin' about it. That's all."

The two men argued long and earnestly

by turns with the young farmer, but he remained obstinate. They begged to be allowed to go into the house with him where they could do some figuring that might convince him, but he refused brusquely and finally very pointedly turned his back on them and went into the house.

The two oil men looked at each other in disgust.

"Well," Haslip asked, "have we got to beat it without finding out whether the woman is here or not?"

"If she's here," Gantry replied, "she's been watching us out of a window somewhere. I know that bird. If she sees us that will pretty near accomplish our purpose. All we want to do is to let her know we're watching her so she won't try any funny business. Maybe she hasn't got here yet. She's due to-day sure, though. Let's stick around down the road a little while and keep our eyes peeled. She may come along."

As it turned out, they had not long to wait. They had barely reached the bottom of the drive when a livery car from Senabaugua swung in. The passenger on the back seat was a neatly dressed, well-preserved woman in the forties, of the blond type, with a hard face and a hunted look in her cold blue eyes.

"There she is now," Gantry exclaimed, stepping out into the drive and signaling the driver of the car to stop.

The woman's face suddenly went pale as he stepped up to the side of the car.

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I!" mocked the man. "So you broke from cover at last. What do you propose to do here?"

"Nothing that concerns you," she declared defiantly. "You and your precious pals kept me in hiding for years by making me think there was a charge standing against me here. I've learned the truth at last, and I've come back to get the money that's due me and to cut loose from this dirty little hole in the ground for good. You'll have no more hold on me."

"Just remember this, my fine lady," Gantry retorted. "We have other evidence up our sleeves where we can use it if you let drop one word that'll queer us."

"Fake evidence," she snorted.

"Maybe so," he replied easily, "but it would look real in court, believe me. A word to the wise is sufficient. Drive on, James."

The oil men went off down the road, and the woman, frankly disturbed despite her defiant manner in the presence of her tormentors, continued on to the house. A moment later Mert Dibble, standing in the door of his home, after five years confronted his hated stepmother. He had expected to hear from her soon through Mr. Beecham, his trustee, but to meet her thus unannounced took his breath away. She was the first to speak.

"No use in glaring at me, Mert. I can't do you any harm. I've just come to talk to you about settling the estate."

"You can't talk to me," Mert managed to say without offering to invite her in. "Mr. Beecham attends to all my business. Go an' see him."

"And don't ever come back," he added with a burst of fury that left him white and trembling.

"So?" she sneered. "Very well, young man. I suppose I can't blame you, but I've been punished pretty well already for all the harm I did here. Let me give you one piece of advice, though. It's not because I want to help you, but because I want to block some people who've injured me. Don't have any dealings with the men who just left, or anybody connected with them. They're crooks. Watch out for what happens in this valley during the next year."

She reentered the waiting car and drove off.

Mert sat for a long time thinking over the situation. Then he called up Beecham and told him of his meeting with his stepmother, and gave him authority to use his judgment in dealing with her. After a little more thought, he went down to the back lot where Firewater Joe was contentedly at work.

"Joe," he said. "How'd you like another job than this?"

Joe came as near showing emotion as he ever had in life.

"You goin' fire me, Mert?" he asked

anxiously. "Maybe I drinkum too much firewater?"

"No, no, Joe! Never that. I'm just going to give you a different job than this with just as much pay and more fun in it. It's what we called intelligence work in the army. I got wind that the oil men are after the valley again. They're a bunch o' crooks. Two of 'em tried to get after me to-day. I turned 'em down. Now they'll probably try to put it over by some trick. Prob'ly Sam Goar'll have a finger in it. Now I want you to pretend that you and I had a row and I fired you. I'll dig up another man to work here. Then you prowl around and see what you can pick up about Goar's place and among the farmers, and let me know about it. I'll pay you the same wages as before, and you can report to me secret like after dark whenever ye learn anything."

It took considerable more explanation to make this clear to the Indian, but he gave his consent at last, and Mert felt that finally he had made a start in counterplotting against the plotters.

CHAPTER V.

MERT MEETS A SETBACK.

SOON after Mert Dibble had completed this arrangement with Firewater Joe the date was announced for the long heralded meeting of the farmers to listen to the cajoleries of the oil man from Flowerville. Mert had meantime been making preparations for it.

To begin with, he casually managed to see at one time and another each of the land-owners of the valley and sound them out as to their sentiments. What he learned was not very encouraging. The older men, those of his father's generation, were for the most part in sympathy with Mert. Some of them were more or less lukewarm, it is true, and in some instances Mert had an uneasy feeling that they were not quite sincere in their promises of support.

His canvas of the men of the younger generation was even more disheartening. They were mainly non-committal. Some

of them, however, were outspoken in their determination to sell their property if they could get a good figure for it, or their oil rights if the opportunity seemed good. Those who came out unequivocally and gave him evidently sincere promise of backing in his fight were a scant dozen from both generations, and he suspected that when it came to the pinch they would be willing for the most part to go no farther than the use of moral suasion.

In the meantime Joe, with true Indian cunning, had proved resourceful in glean- ing information. Cut loose from Dibble farm he had been doing day work about the valley. He proved fickle, and seldom worked more than a day or two on any one farm. As labor was scarce during that summer after the war he could work about where he pleased and when he pleased. In this way he managed to gather the barn- yard gossip of every section of the valley in the course of the next two weeks.

From him Mert learned that some of those who had been non-committal to him were really hotly for the oil prospectors' proposal, and that the men of the pro-oil group were planning to pack the meeting by bringing there every hired man and out- sider they could muster, including a good sprinkling of Hookfingers, and get there early so that the opposition coming later would already find the little schoolhouse full. He also gathered hints from Joe that enabled him finally to pick eight men on whom he knew he could depend to go the limit, and these he took into his confidence.

He decided also to do some packing of the meeting himself. But he didn't propose to depend on erratic hired men and other doubtful camp-followers. Down in Sena- baugua were a considerable number of newly returned soldiers like himself, eager for excitement. Mert was intimate with some of them and gathered together fifteen raucous young veterans itching for trouble. If the oil crowd tried to pack the meeting they would run against a pretty stiff coun- ter-packing. The little schoolhouse held only about fifty persons at the utmost, in- cluding standing room. To give color to the presence of men from outside the val- ley Mert craftily circulated through the

agency of his fellow-conspirators the state- ment that as many residents of Senabaugua as would be interested in buying oil-stock would be welcome at the meeting.

The evening before the meeting Mert heard just after dark the agreed signal of Firewater Joe, a whippoorwill call repeated three times. Down by the river in the edge of the woodlot he found his scout.

"Women goin' raisum hell with oil meet- ing," he announced. "That Hookfinger fellow work for Mis' Flanders he say Mis' Flanders she all time talk she want sell farm, get heap rich from oil well, go to city. She say any woman wife one big fool not make husband get rich quick. She all time callum up women on telephone and say so. She say all women go to meeting make men sellum oil. How can you do? White man no can fight woman with club. White woman beat white man with tongue. You no like women, Mert, you better stay from meeting."

Mert's high hopes of "rough-housing" the oil meeting or at least of standing up and talking down and outvoting the advo- cates of well-drilling dimmed instantly. He had counted on a group of some fifty male neighbors before whom he could express himself with the utmost freedom either with tongue or fists. Mert had no trace of shyness about him where men were con- cerned. But introduce a half dozen women into his audience and his tongue would be tied and his hand stayed.

Furthermore, he knew enough of wom- en's influence to realize that Joe's report of the feminine sentiment in Goar Valley ar- gued ill for the success of the anti-oil movement. He began to fear that even his pledged supporters might be affected. He was wise enough to see, too, that any bru- tal measures taken in the presence of these women, particularly any demonstration against them would do his cause more harm than good.

He paced the floor of his room until late that night trying to decide upon a course of action. He got up early, his mind made up. Before it was fairly daylight he was on his way to Senabaugua. A selected group of his friends, under the pretense that they were to hold a veterans' organiza-

tion meeting, had luncheon together in a private room at the Senabaugua Hotel.

There for the second time in the history of Goar Valley a band of Night Riders was organized. The plan enthusiastically agreed upon by the young dare-devils was to go to the meeting inconspicuously and watch proceedings. If Firewater Joe's prediction that the women were planning to control the meeting should prove true they would lie low until after it was over and the feminine influence removed. Then Mert was to detain the oil missionary under pretext of asking him for further information.

Meantime the rest of the band would draw off and put on the traditional masks of the Night Riders and lie in ambush for the party with the oil man. They'd remove the prospector to a secluded spot and treat him rough—so rough, in fact, that he would see the wisdom of leaving Goar Valley alone. And the Night Riders would remain permanently organized and ready at any time to make it unhealthy for anybody attempting to do any drilling, just as the band had done with whom Mert's father had ridden a decade before.

The little schoolhouse was packed to overflowing when Mert Dibble arrived at the meeting. Others were still coming. After changing their original plan the conspirators had decided that it was better to come late and individually so as to make their presence as inconspicuous as possible.

Firewater Joe's tip proved correct. The women of the valley were there in force. They occupied the benches while their men folks stood in the aisles and at the rear. Those who came late craned their necks in at the doorways or stood outside leaning over the sills of the open windows. On the platform back of the teacher's desk sat a sort of reception committee of two. One, of course, was Jim Plunkett, trustee of the Goar Valley School District, gaunt, stoop-shouldered, his Abraham Lincoln whiskers newly trimmed for the occasion and his shallow blue eyes gleaming with self-satisfaction. Plunkett would be with the oil men. He was a chronic chairman in that section and was always for any cause whose sponsors flattered him by making him presiding officer of something or other.

The other member of the committee was Mrs. Henry Flanders, a big, impressive person, whose broad face usually radiated motherliness, but to-night was set in determined, fighting lines. She was studying the growing audience critically with the air of one counting noses.

Mert saw to his disgust and further uneasiness that Violet Worthington, the Flanders's persistent and ubiquitous boarder, was on the front bench under the very edge of the platform with the two Flanders girls. He chuckled inwardly with satisfaction a moment later, however, after taking an inventory and noting that every member of his gang was on hand well scattered through the audience. The speaker of the evening, Mr. Alexander C. Dunsmore, of Flowerville, had not yet arrived.

Just as the audience was getting restless he came, driving up in a car and elbowing his way breezily through the crowd to the platform, a big, impressive man, blond and jovial, and dressed in an easy-fitting but expensive knockabout costume. He had a large part of his audience with him from the start. Beginning with a brief description of the methods of locating and drilling oil wells he went on with a history of the oil business in America, telling story after story of sudden wealth until Mert noted with growing uneasiness that some of those he had counted on as his staunchest supporters were interested in the speaker's word pictures. Finally he got down to cases.

"Now I expected to come here to-night to get permission from one of you land-owning gentlemen to start the ball rolling by giving us the right to drill a test well on his land before we committed ourselves or you to any extensive speculation. We believe, by every known scientific test, that there are rich deposits of oil under this valley. But before we spend much money here or ask you to spend any we'll test it out with one well. If it pans out we'll want options on all your land in the name of a new company in which we will give you an opportunity to invest up to forty-nine per cent of the stock. We are conservative people and not at all the blue-sky, wild-cat sort who have done so much to discredit the honest oil business.

"But, happily, our present object has already been obtained. We have already a site for this experimental well. So all I wish to do to-night is to acquaint you with your opportunity and secure your friendly interest. It is to the interest of all of us that we do little talking meantime till we know how our first venture is succeeding. There are all sorts of dishonest promoters watching this valley who would only be too pleased to let somebody else do the dirty work of experimenting and then hop in and reap the benefits by starting fake wells, tying up your lands in tricky options at terms that on the face of them would look more alluring than anything that we as honest people could offer, then getting you to sink your fortunes in fake stock. That's been done before right over the hills here, and I don't blame the men of this valley for being skeptical of all oil men as a result of the experience of your neighbors, and, I understand, of one of your own number a generation ago. I advise you to make no deals with any one without first seeing our people."

There was much more of alluring palaver from this oleaginous gentleman before he finally revealed the secret that was causing the little audience to hum with curiosity.

"Now before we close I take great pleasure in announcing that this lady here at my right, Mrs. Henry Flanders, is the fortunate person on whose land the first of our wells is to be drilled."

Mrs. Flanders puffed herself out to even more than her usual girth, and amid a hum of excitement and a rush to question and congratulate that complacent lady the meeting broke up.

As agreed beforehand among the new Night Rider band, Mert elbowed his way toward the platform to engage the speaker in conversation. The other members of the band were already drifting unobtrusively out. It was agreed that by having Mert with the oil man when he was attacked and for the raiders to treat him apparently as a fellow victim, suspicion would be thrown off the real leader of the band.

He was intently eying the oil man who was just leaving the platform and pausing to shake hands with one person and another

when suddenly he found himself looking again into the eyes of Violet Worthington, who was standing waiting for Mrs. Flanders. The brown eyes of the young woman were neither friendly nor pathetic this time. They were keen and searching. Mert shrank involuntarily. He felt as if the young woman were looking right through him. But he shook off his hesitation and steeling himself to push through the encircling ring of women, he had nearly reached Dunsmore's side, when Miss Worthington pushed her way through to the oil man and said something to him in a low tone, turning and glancing at Mert as she did so. Dunsmore looked his way for an instant. Then he straightened up alertly.

"You must excuse me, good people, but I find I must break away. I have just time to make my train."

The little throng about him parted and flanked by Violet Worthington on the left and Mrs. Flanders on the right, one Flanders girl leading and the other bringing up the rear, he went swiftly out to his waiting car before Mert could intercept him as planned. His feminine bodyguard stepped back, he settled himself in the seat, spoke a word to his chauffeur, and with a roar the car shot away into the night, in a direction opposite to that calculated upon by the Night Riders and in which they were lying in wait.

Mert had already confirmed one suspicion by a glance at his watch. The last train out of Senabaugua station that night had left a half hour before. And as he watched the powerful racing car leap into the road he noted something else.

It was a car of the same peculiar make as that which had borne away his mysterious burglar two weeks before.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT RIDERS.

MERT DIBBLE'S mind was beset by two puzzles as he returned to his waiting band of new-fledged Night Riders and broke the news to them that their plan had been frustrated. But it seemed best to him not to take his comrades

into his confidence in regard to either of them at present. He was too uncertain of his suspicions and too puzzled as to what could be their meaning in case his suspicions should prove correct.

In the first place he had an uneasy feeling that Miss Violet Worthington had in some uncanny fashion divined the fact that he meant mischief and warned the oil man of his danger. It might be nothing more than woman's intuition of which Mert had heard, coupled with a natural interest in the man with whom her hostess, Mrs. Flanders, was doing business. Nevertheless, it worried Mert and gave him a tendency to look on Miss Worthington as an active enemy instead of merely the persistent nuisance he had hitherto regarded her.

The second puzzle was the resemblance between the car in which the oil man had come to the meeting and the one that had borne away his strange burglar. Of course it was perfectly possible that it was a mere coincidence that both men used the same type of car. But it was a very unusual type of car, of a make he had never seen in the valley before. Why any one should rifle his old oak secretary was mystery enough. Why the marauder should be a wealthy oil man from Flowerville or one of his emissaries was a greater one still.

He kept his council regarding these intangible phases of the problem and merely told the gang for some unaccountable reason the oil man had departed in a hurry in a direction opposite to the one from which he came. It was decided before the band broke up that they would take no further action until the drilling machinery for the Flanders well began to arrive. Then they would resort to old-fashioned destructive tactics.

After thinking it over he decided to take his trustee, Beecham, into his confidence as far as the burglary and its attendant mystery was concerned. As for Miss Worthington's connection with the matter his suspicions seemed too intangible to be discussed.

"I was just goin' to call you up, Mert," said Beecham when the young farmer entered the lawyer's office the next morning. "I got an acceptance of our offer from your

stepmother this morning and you're all shet o' her. She was quite willing finally to sign off all dower rights under the court settlement of the estate or your father's will if it's ever found. I guess she needed the two thousand pretty bad. It leaves you short o' cash, but it's a cheap way to get rid of her. Of course if that other will leavin' everything to her—lock, stock, an' barrel—ever turns up, this agreement don't hold. But she swears she ain't got any such will. So there ye are. If she had it she'd probate it, I'd say. I couldn't worm a thing out of her."

"Well," Mert conceded, "I'll accept, of course. Can't see any harm in it. So that settles that. Now I got another thing on my bean that's botherin' me a heap more'n that."

He then told Beecham all about the mysterious burglary, the man who addressed the meeting in the schoolhouse, and the duplicate cars. The lawyer thought in silence for some minutes after he had finished.

"Wal, Mert," he said finally, "the way it looks to me is mebbe we aren't done with this stepmother o' yours yet. Here's the dope. Your father kept his private papers in that secretary, and so did you. Whoever directed the robbing of that secretary knew enough about the inside workings of your house to know the papers were kept there. He was interested in those papers. Now who knew about the contents of that secretary and at the same time was interested in them? Why, your stepmother.

"Now, let's see how come, as the feller says. What papers would she be interested in? Did she find 'em? The answer to the first question is: one or both o' those wills. I'd say to the second that she hadn't found 'em yet, but hadn't given up. If she didn't make way with your will she'd still be interested in doin' so as long as she had the other will up her sleeve and was in doubt which was the last one. On the other hand, maybe she did lose the other will and thinks it might be in some hidden place in the old secretary and that we'd overlooked it. That makes me think.

"Only your father had access to that secretary while he was alive, unless he let her

look into it, too. There might be some secret drawer at that. Anyhow, anyway we figure it, I'm moral certain that woman is still huntin' fer a will an' this signin' off is jest to throw us off the track. Even so, I can see no harm in settlin' with her. It gives you clear title in law to the property, provided the will she thought she had is never found. And I have a hunch she'll never find it. Just as I have a hunch it was she made way with your will. But watch out fer her. And make another look fer secret drawers in that old secretary."

"But that doesn't account fer this oil guy from Flowerville mixin' up in it if there's anything in my hunch about the two cars bein' the same," said Mert. "If the cars was the same and what you say about this woman is right, then she and this oil fellow are in cahoots. She claims to me she's on the outs with that Flowerville Oil Company gang. Maybe that's a blind, too. Let's run down this man Dunsmore and see if he traces back any way to the old gang. If he does we'll know we're up against the same bunch of rummies that dad fought and be pretty sure my dear stepmother has a finger in the pie with 'em yet."

But, though Beecham made a trip to Flowerville for that express purpose, he could find nothing to connect the Hon. Mr. Dunsmore with the Flowerville Oil Development Company. He appeared, as far as his inquiries could ascertain, to be one of the leading figures in a group of capitalists who had put up a little money with the idea of putting up more and forming a company if the initial venture succeeded. There was nothing to indicate that the venture was not a thoroughly legitimate one, with no dubious history behind the promoters.

This report, however, in no way deterred Mert Dibble from his determination to fight them to the last ditch. The Night Riders held several secret meetings and laid careful plans for their next move. Inasmuch as suspicion would fall at once on residents of the valley in case of a Night Rider raid, Mert had wisely confined the members of the band to his rough-and-ready soldier pals of Senabaugua and had not taken into his confidence even the staunchest of his supporters in the valley.

It was further arranged that whenever a raid was on two of the crowd would be detailed to stay at home. As a preliminary Mert would be seen joining these two at one of their homes for a poker game. Well after dark he would depart to join the raiders and the two who stayed behind would be ready to swear in case of suspicion fastening on him that he spent the night with them.

The first actual foray of the gang was carried out on foot. It took place the night after the arrival on the siding of the drilling machinery for the Flanders well. The night operator at the station, dozing over his keys shortly after midnight, heard a gruff "Hands up and shut up!" just outside his window and looked up into the muzzle of an army revolver held by a man whose face was covered with a white mask.

Out in the freight yard the special watchman employed by the oil men to guard the machinery was going through the same experience at the hands of another man in mask. Then out from among the freight cars dodged a dozen other dim figures and began working swiftly about the two flat cars on which lay the machinery. The man guarding the watchman led that unfortunate to the station platform and planted him face against the wall, hands still in the air.

A moment later there came a low whistle from among the freight cars.

"Stay where ye are while ye count a hundred slow," commanded the captor of the watchman, and jumped from the station platform, following several other dim figures that were disappearing in the darkness. The man guarding the telegraph operator covered his victim a moment longer, then sped out into the night after his pals.

He had barely cleared the tracks when there was a deafening roar behind him and several thousand dollars' worth of valuable machinery, including two perfectly good freight cars, were strewn around the freight yards in useless fragments.

Great excitement followed. The inhabitants of the little town poured out into the street in all stages of dishabille, half awake and stupidly inquiring of each other where the explosion was. In the excitement no one noticed that among those who appeared

first on the street were some dozen young men who were a little more wide awake than the rest and who had taken the precaution to arrange their clothing carefully beforehand so as to give the appearance of hasty dressing.

Among these early birds the only properly dressed were Mert Dibble and his two poker companions. No one knew that Mert had slipped into his friend's house the moment before by way of the back yard. Now he had in his hand four aces which he explained he had just filled when the explosion came.

The outcries of the telegraph operator drew the crowd to the station. The volunteer fire company arrived there five minutes later, but found nothing to do.

With daylight the sheriff and several deputies, the village constable and the State constabulary of that district all joined in the hunt for clues, but found none. Suspicion centered on the young men of Goar Valley, but close examination got from them nothing but alibis indignantly presented. Mert's opposition to the oil drilling was well known, and he spent several uncomfortable half hours in the sheriff's office. But the young men who vouched for his alibi were war heroes and in good standing in the village. So nothing came of it.

Needless to say, however, the next consignment of machinery sent to Sanabaugua was well guarded from the time it left Flowerville until it was installed on the Flanders farm and drilling begun. The leader of the Night Riders saw that discretion was the better part of valor, and for a time nothing happened. In the first place the district attorney, prodded by the Governor of the State, gave out a statement that any one caught night riding would be held for the destruction of the property of the railroad and of the oil men and get a long term in State prison, and that any death resulting from such night riding would be treated as murder in the first degree.

To give further effect to this warning members of the State constabulary were installed at the Flanders farm, backed up by a strong posse of private guards, all sworn in as deputy sheriffs.

But despite all this hedging about by the sanctity of the law, and despite inability to connect this oil crowd with the old one, Mert Dibble was convinced that the men back of the drilling were crooks. The more he thought of the incident of the similar automobiles the more he was convinced that the similarity was identity and not coincidence. He felt amply justified in his own mind in taking the law in his own hands, his mental processes, it must be admitted, being warped a little by his hatred of the oil men.

He had taken pains, too, with Beecham's aid, to inquire into the contract with the Widow Flanders, and in the opinion of the lawyer the widow herself was amply protected against any personal loss through damage done the oil prospectors' property. In Mert's judgment the crooks would cheat the widow in the end, however well the drilling turned out, and to stop the proceedings at the beginning would be a kindness to her.

After things had quieted down somewhat and Firewater Joe, by scouting around, reported that the guards around the Flanders well had relaxed their vigilance a little, Mert set another raid on foot.

Hence, it came about that on a certain dark night a band of masked horsemen rushed the armed guards on the lower side of the Flanders woodlot, in the center of which was the new well. Those on the other side of the guarded property hearing the shouting and pistol shots and cries for help rushed to their assistance, leaving only two or three men on their side.

Then Mert Dibble, who had been waiting this opportunity in the shadow of a tree, slipped out and darted through the woodlot toward the derrick. In his hand was a bomb with a time fuse which he proposed to place under the derrick, light and then retreat under the confusion of the attack on the other side of the woods.

He was halfway to his destination when he heard a shrill girl's voice cry out behind him: "Help Help! This way. Here's one of them!"

He stopped in momentary panic. Just ahead of him loomed up the dim shadow of a man dashing directly toward him. He heard others crashing through the under-

brush to the left and right. He realized at once that unless he retreated rapidly he would be trapped. The shrill voice just behind him continued to mark his location to the hunters.

He whirled to retrace his steps, dropping his bomb into his pocket at the same time, when something dimly white leaped at him with the spring of a panther. A pair of fragrant, soft arms were flung about his neck, and then seemed suddenly to become steel. Mert could not believe the arms of a girl could be so strong. She had caught him so that for an instant she had him at a disadvantage. But he recovered his poise and seized the soft, strong arms in his hard, muscular hands and wrenched.

And all the time she had been shrieking: "This way! I've got him!"

But as Mert's clutch tightened on her arms she cried out in pain. Involuntarily he released her arms.

Once more he tried to shake himself loose, this time with an absurd, almost timid gentleness, that made him furious, but he was restrained by a mysterious power that the

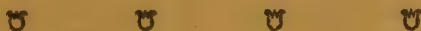
woman-hater had never before experienced. Then, in desperation, he reached down, caught the lithe-skirted form about the knees, picked her off her feet and fled with her in his arms.

The only possible direction of flight now was toward the house. The guards were closing in on him from every other direction. Out of the woodlot, through the barnyard, he ran, still carrying the girl. He could hear one of the guards now close behind him and gaining at every stride. He had no recourse but to dash straight into the path of light from the kitchen door that had been left open by one of the aroused household.

And as he did so he stumbled and half pitched forward. At that the girl broke loose from his arms and slipped to her knees in front of him. As she did so she snatched away his mask and he found himself face to face with Violet Worthington, his countenance clearly betrayed by the bright light.

And at that instant a State constable leaped upon him from behind.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



FAR SEAS

A LYRIC thrill is in the phrase—Far Seas,
And we in fancy lean o'er tossing foam;
The surf that pounds the Outer Hebrides,
And Tahiti where the lazy rollers comb.

We glimpse the littered harbors of the East,
Hongkong and Yokohama, romanced flows,
That hold reflections of the lantern feast,
And burn across with daybreak's sudden rose.

The tides of mystery at the Golden Horn,
That wash by Asia Minor's sunrise door;
And icy channels in dim lands forlorn,
Brim to our eyes across rich Fancy's floor.

Wet horizons that lure the restless heart,
The ever steady Trades and off-shore breeze;
And ships that swing to port or else depart,
These clothe the fabric of our dream—Far Seas.

Thomas J. Murray.

Worlds within Worlds by



Philip M. Fisher, Jr.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

OBSESSED BY SCIENCE.

I AM, by nature, tremendously energetic. Over matters that interest me, I conceive an almost hectic enthusiasm. When at work on my favorite study, this energy, this enthusiasm, drives me on to concentrated and consuming labors which no mere human mechanism can long endure. It is no wonder then, that toward the beginning of the month of June, of the year just passed, I began to feel that my physical powers were fast on the ebb. I appealed to my friend and physician, Dr. Charles Courtenay. He examined me—and shook his head in grave silence.

I declared that for a week more I must go on—must finish the experimentation in the physics of crystallization before the end of the present semester. He told me that my life was my own—he could advise. Fools, he added, to their own folly! And he shook his finger gravely in my face.

For four days more I continued, from six o'clock in the morning, till twelve at night—and sleepless during the interim with a mind teeming with suggestions, new theories, fanciful relationships, the thousand and one ideas that a brain obsessed by one all-absorbing passion, and a body living

but to mature the child of that one passion, bring to the conscious personality. Then came the break.

My work would be complete on the thirteenth. I worked even later than usual on the night of the eleventh. I threw myself on my bed fully clothed at two in the morning, utterly exhausted, body and soul. I tried to sleep, but could not. I took an opiate that would have killed a normal man—without effect. I tried all the countless methods of producing sleep that man may conjure up—in vain.

Continually through my mind was running the thought—"that work must be complete by to-morrow night, or your ten months labor is ruined beyond repair." I would doze a fraction of a second, and this thought, as the maddening shrill of an alarm clock, would jerk me awake. I would drop slowly off again—and again that relentless self-imposed idea would snatch me from the oblivion I craved. And all the time would be whirling in the background of my consciousness these suggestions, theories, fanciful ideas which a brain, over-stimulated by persistent and consistent endeavor along one line of mental development, will, even against volition, produce.

Do what I might, I could not sleep.

I became worried.

I became excited—and fear developed.

At dawn of June twelfth I saw that unless my condition changed, unless my mind could be steadied, gotten under control of my will, all attempt at work that day would be utterly useless. In the midst of this mental chaos I felt a rapid sinking sensation—and at short intervals my whole vision, inner and outward, was enveloped in a blackness indescribable.

I called my sister.

During the wait for the physician I almost went mad. My sister has since told me that I threatened, in case Courtenay did not arrive in a minute more to put an end to my life—an extremity from which, in normal thought, I would turn with nausea and disgust.

After one glance he sent Charlotte from the room, and took my hand in his.

"Gordon," he said, "there's no need for me to tell you—your condition is very serious."

I nodded.

"There is one treatment now, and, unless you can of your own will power drive out all thought but that of cool deep slumber, only one, by which we can bring you back to your old self."

I nodded. One learns of many things in my profession.

Dr. Courtenay went on, still holding my hand. And the coolness, the firmness, the sympathy of his touch, lessened to an extent my suffering. Still the cursed array of thoughts, ideas, theories, madly whirling; still the terrible unforgettable anxiety over the completion of my labors continued.

"It's dangerous—" Courtenay started on.

"For God's sake!" I cried. "Kill me, or cure me. This is unbearable."

"In seven other cases," he continued gravely, "this cure has been attempted. I would not tell you of this, I would not make so grievous a psychological error by putting more fear in your mind, Gordon, did I not know the type of mind you possess. I do not hesitate to acquaint you with the actual fact because I know that if there be the remotest chance for the best, you will seize it. Your mind has been

drilled with facts; statistics, marvels of experimentation; you will therefore be better off knowing it is a fact that this treatment, though still in a blind experimental stage, has been in a majority of the cases, successful. Seven times has it been given; and of those seven trials four were quite successful; three were evidently not. Four of the patients recovered, one did not, and the other two, after a short period during which they seemed entirely normal, suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth—simply went off to their work, in good spirits and health, and never were seen, or heard of again. You are of the type of the six who got up again—your chances, Gordon, are excellent. I tell you this, as I said before, because you are the type of man who wants to know his chance, and ought to know his chance. Shall we try it?"

All during my friend's rather long but sympathetic explanation my mind was in a turmoil—and yet I thoroughly understood all he said.

"Tell Charlotte," I said.

He called my sister in and gently explained the situation. She bravely smiled, and with one hand on my forehead, her frank eyes on mine, asked me what was my own choice.

"Try it," I said.

She then turned from me and nodded to Dr. Courtenay.

"Go ahead," she consented. "Do the best that can be done."

It strikes me as strange that I can remember all of this. And yet through the whole trouble, despite that roaring tumult in my mental background, the conversation, the actions, the display of emotion of all those about me were all as clear as day. I heard, felt, or saw all that was said, all that touched me, all those who came to my aid, and all that was done about me. All made its impression—and yet at the same time I was nearly mad from loss of sleep and the haunting horror of my madly active brain.

My physician called in consultation Dr. Greaves, whom many persons about the bay will recognize as perhaps the West's greatest curer of nervous disease, and of those peculiar cases coming under the order

of psychology. He, too, agreed that the chance should be taken.

CHAPTER II.

THE DRUGS.

WITH heads together they made out two prescriptions—one to be taken internally in the form of a liquid, the other of an etherial sort which I must inhale through a contrivance somewhat similar to the ether cone of the operating room. The former was to be taken hourly, and was stimulating to the heart action and digestive functioning. The latter was to be taken for a period of at least fifteen minutes at a stretch immediately after the former—and was calming to the nerves, composing to the mind. The former was needed to build up, even as the latter, in its powerful drugging action, tore down the very nerve fibers of the body. Both were needed—they were complementary. Take the stimulant without the soporific and disaster would be sure. Take the soporific and not the stimulant, and quick death was inevitable. It was both, or neither.

And to take both—my chances were at least favorable. To take neither—I knew clearly enough that I would go mad—or die.

Of the seven who had taken the suggested treatment, four had recovered, one had died, and two had seemed to recover; then—why, how, or where now one could tell—they had disappeared. I remember that even as I lay in torment awaiting the stuff, I wondered vaguely what had become of these men who seemed to recover, then disappeared. Did they go off and take their own lives? Was the thing mere coincidence and were both shanghaied and murdered in some far-off land? Had some uncontrollable desire seized them to run off and hide from men? Or were they victims of amnesia, an aftermath of their first crop of mental trouble?

Vaguely I wondered, little dreaming then that I myself would some day go to join those two, little dreaming of the strange things I was to learn in those short three days to come.

The medicines arrived.

They were pleasant to take, despite the powerful drugs used, drugs which, used alone, could kill an army. With the first draft of liquid I felt the stronger beating of my heart. With the first breath of the volatile soporific I felt a soft relaxation, in body and in mind, that I knew at once meant grateful rest, sleep, and new life.

Yet even as I sank back in the soothing embrace of that gentle somnifacient, with my sister's cool hand on my forehead, Dr. Courtenay's steady one on my pulse, I remarked the gravity of the latter's countenance and that of his consultant's, and, with things going so well, and peace of heaven coming to me at last, I wondered, why.

I slept, I am told, for a half hour without break, under the influence of the powerful drug. I awoke restlessly, and my first thought was of my work. Then Dr. Courtenay's face loomed large before me, and his hand closed again about my wrist. I lay still, and strangely enough, though my mind still was chaotic, I felt no desire to move.

No one spoke except my sister, whose gray eyes were continually on mine, and who hovered by my bedside like the guardian angel that she was.

"Comfy?" she asked, smiling.

"Better," I whispered, and promptly dropped asleep.

I was awakened shortly; given the stimulant, administered the etherlike soporific. I felt again the tonic of the draft, promptly again floated off on the gentle vapors of the emanation I breathed.

In less than an hour I was awakened again. The physicians were both still present, concern still in their eyes. My sister was still sitting by my bed with the same look on her face. I was given again the same treatment as before. As I dropped off to sleep again, I was strongly aware that I felt more mentally at peace, more bodily alert, than before. It seemed, too, that this time there was a slight struggle between those two drugs, the one acting on my body and spurring on the involuntary digestive and assimilative functions, the other giving my brain a chance to rest.

They acted on different parts of me, to be sure, and yet both of those parts are, I had always believed, components of our total physical make-up. Hence, it might easily be, that after several administrations of each drug, the one might come in contact with the other through sheer inertia, and before either was properly and completely absorbed where needed. I wondered dimly, as the black cloud of unconsciousness enveloped me, just what reaction would take place, and what physically might happen to me, were those two powerful drugs to meet in my body in their pure form.

Suppose my body, after several doses, refused to assimilate the liquid stimulant, but threw it, chemically unbroken, into my blood, thence into my body cells. And at the same time, suppose my blood, carrying the drug I inhaled from my lungs to all parts as well as to my brain, surcharged already with the stuff from previous doses, refuse to assimilate the vapor but carry it, too, chemically unbroken, to my body cells. And in my blood, in my cells, these two drugs, one stimulative, the other narcotic, meet—what would happen? Vaguely I recalled these seven men on whom, medical history stated, this same treatment had been given. Four had recovered—one died—two had apparently gotten well, and then—disappeared. What—what—would happen—happen—to—me—to—

It seemed but a moment before I was awakened once more, and the treatment again applied. Both doctors were still present. A starched and dainty nurse was with them now. What, I thought, startled a bit, is my trouble? Is the danger still as grave as all that—that I must have a nurse as well as two physicians? And still my dear sister's presence, too? I tossed restlessly a few moments while the draft was being administered. That mental background of fanciful suggestion and theory regarding my experiment in the physics laboratory had softened to but a gently insistent throb, as of the pulsations of a distant irrigation engine heard at early morning in the spreading valley of the San Joaquin. This throbbing, let me say, was far from being distressing—it was in fact, a very endurable sensation, almost pleas-

ant—a sensation I never had experienced before. And, also, may never again—Though as to that, of course, I cannot tell. I only trust it may if it would bring me again the happy experience which it prophesied before; and the love I found.

Again, in silence, and under the grave eyes of my physician, I took the drugs. Again I felt the stimulating power of the one, then from the other the diminution of sensation which meant sleep and peace.

For a day and two nights was this double drugging continued. Each time I was awakened the background of my mental trouble was fainter and fainter. Each time, too, was the intensity of that new throbbing sensation greater and more pronounced. Each time, too, it seemed as though the rate of that strange throbbing had increased, as though the thing were speeding up.

And finally on the morning of the fourteenth of June, when I was conscious that the light of yet another day was trickling around the drawn blind, I awoke suddenly of my own accord. The throbbing in my head had changed to a vibrant humming, and to my intense surprise, seemed to be now in my body as well as my mind—and keenly, peculiarly pleasant. I felt lighter, as though gravity itself had been well nigh eliminated. I was frightened for a moment, wondering if the thing meant death. Then decided that my strength was returning and my lightness merely due to lack of food.

My whole body was a-hum. I moved an arm and touched my thigh. A strange vibrant sensation, almost electrical, tingled the skin of leg and hand. I moved my hand about and touched other parts of my body. Always this peculiar tingling. It was so pleasant, seemed so invigorating, gave me such a feeling of strength that I made a move to sit up in bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE PASSING.

AT once some one shot up the window blinds, then heavy muffled steps trod toward me. It was Dr. Courtenay, still in attendance. I smiled,

opened my lips to remonstrate with him for his self sacrificing friendship, when suddenly, in mid-step, he jerked short, his hands spread tensely, his body went rigid, his head thrust forward and his jaw dropped as though in terrible surprise, while in his face and eyes there froze a look of such horror and sympathy as I hope never to see again. In astonishment, for I felt so vibrantly well, I stared back. For a full minute, the morning light flooding in upon us, we both held tensely thus.

Then with a sob, Courtenay cried:

"Oh, my God, my God—what next?"

Then, controlling himself with great effort, he stumbled into the chair at my side.

"Gordon," he said softly, reaching, almost warily it seemed to me, for one of my hands. "Gordon"—his voice was husky, his eyes frightened—"how—how—do you—feel?"

I smiled.

"Never better!" I said. "Can I get up?"

His eyes filled with pain. He gripped my hand hard with the one hand, and pushed me back with the other.

"No—no—no—not—not yet!" he cried hoarsely. "Not yet!" He still held my hand tightly, but was passing his other over my form as though afraid that I would leap up, as though to soothe me by his touch, as though to simply reassure me that he was there, that help, sympathy, friendship, were at my side, ready and willing. "Promise me—" he jerked out, his eyes burning on mine—"promise me—you will not move till I return—promise—Gordon!"

His anxiety was so deep that I pressed his hand again and smiled once more.

"I feel so much better," I said. "Lighter, freer—I—"

"My God!" cried Dr. Courtenay again. "Gordon—promise—"

"Surely I won't move till you get back," I assured him gravely.

He gently placed my hand on the coverlet, stared once more unbelievably, then staggered, positively staggered, from the room. In the distance I heard him frantically calling Charlotte—then Miss Larsen, the nurse. Then in loud protest for

central at the phone. My senses were singularly acute—a thousand conjectures flashed across my mind—what was the matter? I felt perfectly well. I looked down at my hand. But for a peculiar, almost luminous, whiteness which was certainly due to the rapid drain of my illness, I could see nothing wrong with it. And surely the rest of me could appear no stranger than that. And I felt so keenly alive, so vibrant, so humming with energy—why had good old Courtenay been so terribly frightened? Why could I not get up? What was so extraordinarily wrong with me? Why was he even now calling excitedly in the phone for his consultant, Dr. Greaves? In Heaven's name, surely I was not dying! Not I! Yet—why—"

My sister came running.

"Gordon—" she cried softly—then quickly shrank back with the same look of sudden pain and terror as had the doctor but a moment before. "Oh!" she cried. "Oh, oh—"

Then, with visible effort, she came toward me. I smiled, and waved my hand. The humming all throughout me, which I felt rather than heard, seemed on the increase—and my spirits seemed to rise with it.

Charlotte dropped into the chair beside my bed, and reached out hesitantly and touched my hand. Then, with the pain somewhat lessened in her eyes, seized it and held tightly, at the same time with her other hand covering her eyes.

I stared.

"Why, Charlotte," I remonstrated, "I feel fine—what's the matter?"

Then I, too, started—and for a moment went tense with sudden amazement. My sister sat between me and the window, and I would have sworn that the light from the window seemed to penetrate her very body. I stared as a man dazed by a blow. She seemed strangely white, luminously white—even as white as my hands on the coverlet. Heavens! The thought flashed through me. What has come over my eyes? Or are these people right, and am I dying? Or have I gone mad? That strange, pleasant sense of vibration throughout the whole of me—could that be the forerunner of either of

these? But, no, death was not always pleasant, nor was loss of one's mind, either, and here I did feel so overpowering alive, so utterly well!

And yet—my eyes!

I started at Charlotte—the light from the window, even the skeleton appearance of the window framing itself, seemed to penetrate *through* her. I could *see* the window, dimly, but I could see it *through* my sister's very clothes and body! You're delirious, I said to myself. You've studied physics, you are supposed to be an authority on matters of mechanics and heat and sound and light. You know that the human body is practically opaque, that light cannot penetrate through it so as to affect the human eye. But you do see through your sister's! What's the answer? Simple enough. When the doctor left the room you looked up at the window; the sudden bright impression of it, after the darkness of night and sleep, is still on the retina of your eye—which is drugged, too, you must remember, and perhaps slower to erase sensation than are other parts. Good; then with that impression on your eye, when you look at your sister there, you have superimposed on your retina those two pictures of her, and of the window. This naturally leads to the illusion that you see the window through her—which is absurd. Very simple.

I smiled.

"Charlotte," I said, "I'll be up to-morrow, and we'll take the week-end at Mount Tamalpais. What say?"

She pressed my hand and uncovered her eyes.

"Dear," she cried softly—her gray eyes piercing mine, "I—I hope so."

I confess I did not understand. And I was about to question farther when I was aware of the presence of the nurse, Miss Larsen, who had drifted in upon us with the unostentatious quiet of the shadow of a cloud, with us for some little time before we sensed its presence.

Even as I glanced at her, in nebulous white, she gave a little cry, and sank in a heap on the floor.

"Good Heavens!" I cried. "She, too! Charlotte—help there."

My sister, not comprehending, turned

about. Then with another strange look at me, seized a glass of water from the table at her left, and hurried to revive the nurse.

What on earth, I wondered, a bit exasperated, had caused that woman to faint? She was a graduate nurse; surely she had seen worse sights than that of a sick man lying in bed with his sister holding his hand. What womanish whim caused her to stare at me as though I were a diabolic horror, and then crumple up in a faint? If I were worse now, and inflicted with some loathsome disease—but here I was not ill at all; I simply had been worn out, exhausted, troubled with a haunting insomnia, and now, thanks to a combination of powerful drugs, I was a well man, full of a renewed and powerful energy that pulsed madly through my veins, that vibrated in my every atom of flesh and bone. Why this exaggerated ado—when I was *well*?

At that moment the doctor came in, pale and haggard.

"Greaves will be here in a moment," he said breathlessly. "And Morley, and your friend Jones from the laboratories, you know. Don't worry a bit, old fellow, we'll get you out of it—we'll get you out of it. Unheard of, of course—new—very unusual, extraordinary, I might say. But we'll pull you out—we'll—Gordon, lie down, sir. You promised—"

I had arisen to a sitting position. My head swam a bit, but otherwise I felt very well—and tremendously vigorous.

I pointed at the nurse, stretched on the floor, and under my sister's ministrations, just beginning to breathe regularly. He started. He hadn't even noticed them when he had come in.

"What in—" he started.

I raised my finger—for I felt now thoroughly angry.

"Take her out," I said. "And then you come back and tell me what in the devil all this means. I'm damn sick of the 'oh's' and 'my God's' going on about me when I'm neither sick nor mad nor dying. You hear me, Courtenay?"

"My God!" he cried again. Then coming to me. "Feel well—want water—food—anything? How's your head—stomach—those drugs—"

"Did the work!" I snapped. "I'm a well man—I want to get up—I *will* get—"

Courtenay seized me—and though I had believed myself strong, I was powerless in his grasp. I dropped back on my pillows. I turned my eyes upon him, and started even as I had before with Charlotte. For the same phenomenon was apparent to me—his body, too, seemed strangely luminous with the light of the window back of him penetrating through it. What? Could my eye retain the picture of that window as long as this—and still present this strange optical illusion? I stared at Courtenay—and Courtenay stared at me. He moved to one side, nearer my little table. My eyes followed him—and then, I confess, I received a startling surprise.

This time the thing was not due to a retained image on my eye—I could clearly make out, through my good friend's body and clothing, the wall opposite and the picture on it—to me the man seemed quite transparent.

I know when I make this statement that it will hardly be believed. But, mark the words, I said he *seemed* transparent to me—seemed so to *me*.

I lay back with a gasp.

Courtenay was at my side, my hand in his, in an instant.

"Steady," he said. "Steady." Then he called to Charlotte, who now had Miss Larsen on the cot they had placed for her in the corner behind the Japanese screen. She came over.

Courtenay nodded at me.

"What do you think?" he whispered gravely. "Has—has it changed?"

"No," she answered in a troubled voice. "It has not."

There were voices below. A moment more and Dr. Greaves entered, followed by my two good friends, Professor John Morley, of my own College of Physics, and Roswell Jones, an instructor in bio-chemistry. Courtenay arose and waved a hand toward me.

All three stared. Then as in a chorus, hoarsely muttered:

"It is true—it is."

I lay quiet—my whole body now seemed actually vibrating in each and every part.

The sensation was even more pronounced than before—the tingling feeling, the humming I vaguely perceived throughout my every cell, the whole vibrant force in me seemed stranger, faster—faster—faster. I was elated—and yet a little concerned. What was it, after all, leading to? Where could it end? How could it leave me? Did these staring friends of mine—evidently even now debating what should be done in my behalf—did they think that I would not get well? Was it a matter of last resort, even as Courtenay and Greaves had declared the giving of those two opposite-acting drugs had been? Was I losing my senses, too, despite the pleasantness of my bodily sensation?

I stared at the group—why were they so misty-looking all at once? Why—I could make out the whole wall behind them! And—great Heavens—trees beyond the wall—then hills—the Berkeley Hills—*beyond the walls of my house!*

The men started dimly into quick action. I heard their voices faintly—quick, jerky, excited voices—then an appealing, frightened cry from my sister, coming as from a vast distance, and a moment later a light touch as of butterfly's wings that must have been her arms about me.

Yet I felt serene, weightless, alive, pleasant—the humming vibration of my body had increased to a speed which I could hardly comprehend—I had not a worry in the world, nor a pain—I was alive with vibrant energy, and happy.

Why all this rushing about me of phantoms that appeared so like my old friends? Why those frightened voices far, far in the spreading distance? Why those light touches as of dropping leaves here, there, everywhere, on my body, as though a gentle fairy hand were adjusting for my comfort? Why was everything so light, so dim, so far, far away, in the distance?

I arose on my elbows—the dim whirl about me increased. I gasped—and even in that instant my friends, the walls of my house, the furnishings, the floor, the roof, even the clothes on my bed and the bed itself, rushed into nothingness!

With a sensation I cannot describe I suddenly realized that I was lying in mid-air—

quietly, peacefully, pleasantly! Resting on my back in a sea of nothingness—unless what dim outlines I could make out far in the distance were the gentle curves of old Mother Earth. Vaguely I rather hoped that they at least would stay by me. And yet, really, why should *I* care—this glorious sensation, this vibrant hum of real energy and life—how pleasant, how pleasant it was! If this be death—

And then in a flash all went black—I knew no more. Yet in that fleeting instant the thought shot through me—this is the end.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AWAKENING.

THEN again I was aware of things.

The humming within me that had seemed so much a part of my very self had lessened in speed and deepened in tone. I seemed surrounded by a great featureless haze. Dimly I felt that I was no longer floating in space. There was an atmosphere of solidity pervading my entire situation—I felt once more that I was alive, that I had a body that was a concrete thing and not an intangible wraith.

I raised a hand.

At once, somewhere from out the vastness of the haze, came a sound. It might have been the faintest echo from the touch of a valley-hidden bell—it might have been the dimmest ringing reminiscence of the stroke of an ax coming in the evening silence from deep within a wood—it was like that single mysterious *lap* by which unseen and unsuspected waters insinuate their presence on the ear, and vaguely startle one. Just a single sound it was, dim, distant, minute—yet rounded, complete, and full of portent, of good, or evil.

And it came when I raised my hand.

At the same time a shadow flitted through the haze—and was gone.

Then I began to notice degrees of haze. Some was lighter, some thicker, places in it took form—some parts rounded, others angular, still others limbed and branched—like darkening highlights appearing on a film in process of development.

Then swiftly the lights, the shadows, the variformed differences in them rushed up and closer; masses of darkness took definite and strangely familiar shape, splotches of light became clear-cut and contracted sharply with the darker forms. Above my head the haze condensed, spread wide and flat, solidified. A slight dizziness it gave me, for it appeared rushing down to overwhelm me. I closed my eyes, felt my back come in contact with something with a slight jar as though I had fallen a foot or more. There was a rush of definite articulate sound, a feeling of pleasant warmth, a gentle play as of light breath upon my whole body, then a deep and mellow voice, full of sympathy and kindness, and very close to my ear said:

“Come—let us place him on the couch.”

I was seized by shoulders and limbs and carefully lifted.

My feeling of dizziness flew away, and a great surge of energy swept over me.

I opened my eyes.

I was quite unclothed.

I was in the arms of two men whom I had never seen before—tall, calm-faced men, clean-shaven, close-cropped; broad-browed men with kindly piercing eyes, long, straight noses, wide, firm-lipped mouths, and chins and jaws which were suggestive of strength and will—and yet kindly, sympathetic and calm. All this I noted in the instant—I had never seen these men before.

The one at my feet smiled—it must have been at my rather quizzically mystified look. I grinned, I know, a bit sheepishly.

“Feeling better?” he asked gently as they laid me on a couch in the corner of the room.

I nodded.

“Why don’t you put me on my bed?” I asked.

He started, then smiled again at me, and at his companion at my head who was now carefully tucking a robe about me.

The latter sat on the edge of the couch and took my hand in his.

“It isn’t here just now,” he said.

And then as my glance for the first time actually took in the room in which I lay, and the furnishings, I started myself.

“Why—this isn’t my—”

I stopped short—for I had turned to the window at my side and seen the vista lying beneath me.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE FAMILIAR LAND.

THE landscape was an old familiar one: the far shaped land spreading down to the sparkling bay; the islands—Yerba Buena, Alcatraz, Angel—standing clear cut in the morning sun; to the right old Tamalpais, Mountain of the Sleeping Woman, still rising bluely to the pale sky; in the center the Golden Gate and dimly beyond, the Farralones; to the left our phoenix city of ships and gold, and mischief and laughter, and winds and fog—and romance—San Francisco.

Familiar—yet different in small things, *human* things.

I sat and stared—while I heard voices about me, and that kind-faced man so warmly held my hand. I appreciated the pressure he put in it—it gave me a feeling that, despite the things I saw before me, despite the changes or differences I now in detail could see in that so well known vista, I was safely anchored, in good harbor, in friendly hands.

Here was the old college slope below me, spreading to the bay. And yet—different. But a day or two before I could look out on the roofs of buildings, a forest of telephone poles, could see here and there a scattering bunch of foliage, a vacant lot, a spreading field, a cloud of rising smoke, a puffing, steam-ribboned, train along the shore. But now—a green and wooded meadow spread out before me—and on it, half hid here and there in clumps of shaded green, and in delightful contrast gleaming gloriously white, arose strange structures, palace-like. Beyond this at the water's edge, a fringe of low-spread trees, and what appeared to be a thin white pathway running by. Then came the waters of the bay, except for a single white winged craft, absolutely shipless. Not a pier, not a wharf, not a single smudge-clad tugboat, marred the winding shore or sullied the pure blue of the waters—only that single glistening yacht was

there, and that a thing of grace. And the islands—emerald green with foliage, every sheltered nook and sun-warmed vale crystal-dotted with buildings like those at hand. Across and to the left, where had been the deep scored, heavy massed, offices of man, was but another rising slope, and more white buildings glistening here and there on the verdant background. To the right of these softened slopes the open Gate of the West—and then the sleeping woman of Tamalpais, green robed, and shining with a thousand snowy jewels, too.

The scene was the old familiar one—yet changed. It had been crowded, crude, tumultuous; it was now wide, harmoniously beautiful, and pervaded with an everlasting peace. Before, it had bespoken the continual struggle with nature, with man, with self; it had indicated greed, envy, competition, rivalry, hate, bloodshed, passion—with a little essence of deep hid love, and beauty and sincerity, and a great over-spreading froth of false enthusiasm, and artificial culture, and smug hypocrisy. But now—it was in every blade of grass, every clump of trees, in every radiant palace, midst the surf and trees, in that lone bird-like yacht leaning before the breeze so trustfully on the dancing water—now the word was security, happiness, and calm content.

To tell the truth, as these thoughts ran through me I could not have answered yes or no to the simplest question of fact. My training in physics had led me to believe only one thing—my own sensations—my sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. And to these, in many cases where my very life must answer for an error, I had trusted in many a laboratory experiment. On these I had based theories at which even my right worthy colleagues, with the usual callous mockery of professionals, had pointed the finger of scorn. On these I had built up that reputation which had actually forced the university to place in my hands that experiment for which my enthusiastic concentration had plunged me into this—wherever, *whatever*, I was.

Yet here—now—with that familiar but superficially altered landscape before me, could I believe, could I trust my eyes?

I turned to the two strangers, and found them regarding me intently—a little anxiously it might be, also. The man who held my hand, the older man of the two, if indeed there were any difference at all in their ages, must have read my bewilderment in my face.

"You wonder where you are?" he asked, his eyes crinkling humorously at the corners.

I nodded.

"At first I thought I'd awakened in a hospital," I said. "But I'd hardly find myself there on the floor and naked as a new born child if it were a hospital. Nor if I were in a hospital, and as sane as I feel, would I see what greets my eye from this window? So I guess I'm either dead, or dreaming, or crazy."

The pressure tightened on my hand, as both men laughed.

Then the older of the two turned to the door and called out gently:

"Carcita!"

There was a rustle in the next room, and a moment later a girl stood in the doorway—a slender girl, straight and lithe as a reed, and yet rounded with the grace of full womanhood. From under heavy lashes she vouchsafed me one half frightened, eagerly curious, glance. I noticed then that her eyes were a deep, deep blue—and I'll admit that as far as my profession would give me the time to think of it at all, blue eyes had always seemed to me to be the most attractive. Perhaps this is because of the blueness of the sky above, and the purity and clearness and high hope that must go with it.

The girl said:

"Yes, father."

"Oh," said I to myself, "she's his daughter."

The man answered:

"Some light food, dear. Some of that broth we had decided to give him if he came back again."

Again! If who came back again? I? I looked up at the girl—and received another wondering glance. Then the father turned to me.

"Feel strong enough to sit up?" he asked.

"Well!" I smiled, as I followed the girl

out with my eyes. "I know now that I'm either dead, dreaming, or crazy. I can't guarantee which one, sir, but I'm sure it's among the three."

Both men smiled again.

"I meant," said the older—"physically stronger?"

I sat up at once, and with his assistance drew the robe about me. Again I glanced out of the window at the slope before me—then, my mystification growing, back at my companions, and shrugged my shoulders.

"It is," I said a bit wildly. "And yet it isn't. What else can I think!"

"And yet," answered the older man, punctuating his words, with an outthrust hand—"you are neither dead, nor dreaming, nor insane."

"Oh, come now," I remonstrated. "I'm talking here, so I grant I'm not dead—dead men don't talk; my profession teaches me that. So I'm either gone mad, or I am dreaming and in a moment I'll wake up and they'll pour more stuff down my throat and put the gas cone on once more and away I'll go a-humming."

The man took my hand again.

"About the dead talking," he said, "I won't argue as yet. But you may take my word for it that you are neither dreaming nor insane. You are as awake as ever a man might be, and you are as normal mentally as am I myself."

I pointed out of the window.

"Then are my eyes absolutely off?"

He shook his head.

"What do you see there?" he queried.

"Trees," I said, "and meadows and great gleaming white buildings here and there, and—"

He nodded.

"Your eyes, too," he said, "are absolutely normal. What you see, my friend, is there."

"But," I cried stubbornly, "the streets, the crowded houses, the—"

"All done away with—" he started.

"Done away with!" I cried in remonstrance. "You mean—"

"Torn down," he nodded gravely—"years and years ago—thousands—"

I laughed harshly. This was too much

for me. The absurdity of it! I'd awaken in a moment and find Courtenay and the whole mob he had sent for bending over me in that hazy way I had seen them before I fell asleep. Then a sudden thought began to creep up in my mind. I knew it was foolish, all my studies in the realm of physical science had taught me that it was impossible, and yet that little thought took hold, rooted, grew, and blossomed forth complete. And yet—absurd! Wells had written of it to some extent, and Poe, and Kipling, and Bellamy, too, and dozen of others. But these were idle dreamers, whose stories were built up merely as mediums, vehicles, with which to carry to the public the writer's individual and peculiar ideas about the future. Each and all the same—you fell asleep; drifted into a state of coma; your body was preserved and a slow lethargic life maintained miraculously for several generations; you awoke to find yourself a saint, a prince, a savior of the proletariat, a two-bit curiosity, a part owner of the universe, or Heaven knows what else!

I glanced again at the scene outside. I turned again to the oddly furnished room with its smoothly curved corners, its peculiar furnishings, its strange appliances which struck my scientific mind at once, the easy grace of the clothing worn by these two men, and that, I recalled, of the blue-eyed slip of a girl. Things were different—everything was. Even the leaves of the massy tree below us which by all that was logical and normal should be an oak—they looked like oak leaves, and yet—were different.

"Torn down! Years, and years—"

I stared into the man's eyes. Then back to his companion's. In neither could I discover a trace of deceit, mockery, or of laughter now. They were consummate actors, or sincerity itself. Torn down—thousands of years—

Could I have fallen into a state similar to those storied heroes? Had I, under the influence of those awful drugs, been sleeping centuries in the second of time that had seemed to elapse betwixt my extraordinary falling off and this awakening? Were my home, my sister, my friends, my ambi-

tion—even that consuming experiment in crystallization—were these all dead and gone centuries, perhaps thousands of years, in the all but forgotten past? And was I, a mortal remnant of a buried age, marooned in the present amid strange persons and strange surroundings—strange, but because this present was at the same time my future, familiar as well?

A dizziness came over me. Involuntarily my free hand went to my head. I felt myself suddenly atremble.

At once the grasp on my hand tightened. "That glass," snapped the older man—"quick! He may be going back again!"

His companion leaped into action. A moment more and I was swallowing a cool refreshing potion that cleared my head at once.

Again my friend—for that indeed he proved to be—smiled gravely.

"Steady," he said. "You're perfectly safe. No fear. I know you don't understand it all; but you will—you will when you get—back."

I steadied at once.

"Back!" I cried. "Can I get—back?"

"You can, and will," he replied, cheerfully nodding. "We would like you to stay a few days, though, so please do be careful—don't excite yourself—and shortly you will be back. But here's some food—eat it slowly, for it is quickly absorbed by the body and must not be taken too fast."

I looked up again, and the girl was at my side.

"You will help him, Carcita," her father suggested.

The girl flushed red, sat in the proffered chair at my side, placed the tray before me, and indicated of which dish I was first to partake.

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN IDENTICAL SPACE.

I WAS flooded with a hundred thoughts. I was alive! I was here! "Here" was, Heaven knew, what place or time or age—but it was somewhere, at all events! And I could get back! I *would* get back! Back! What did he mean by *back*? Back

in space? No, for surely I must be where I had been—here was the Berkeley slope, there the bay. And yet— Back in time? Nonsense! *That* could not be done—time does not go back. If I were in the future, then—no, this man, whose eyes were so deep and clear and swimming with sincerity, could not deceive me.

I broke out suddenly.

"I can get back?" I cried.

He nodded. The girl started.

"Then," I went on, "this is not the future?"

"Not yours," the man answered ambiguously. "Feeling better?"

"Then you mean," I persisted between spoonfuls of the broth, "that this time right here and now, with everything appearing the same and yet so different, is *my* time, *my* present. That yesterday for you was *my* yesterday; and that on that yesterday, just a few hours ago, I was lying on the bed in my own room half dead with drugs?"

"That is what I mean," he said gravely.

"Then I confess I can't see my way out of the puzzle," I cried. "This is *my* time, and *my* place—I'm here where I ought to be! Now how in the name of physical fact can I be here, and yet not here? How I can go back to where I came from when I'm already there? In Heaven's name—"

I stopped, for all three were laughing—and I had to laugh, too, despite my predicament.

"Before we go on," said the older man, then gravely, "let us know one another. I am Martin Elder, in whose home you now are. This is my daughter, Carcita; and sitting at your feet is my good friend, René Hume, who dwells in yonder building, and who like myself, is a student."

A student, thought I. I wondered—

"My name is Gordon Bliss," I said, "and I am a professor of physics at the University of the West, which is or ought to be right—"

Both men interrupted explosively.

"Professor of *physics*!"

"Why, yes," I answered. "I may be young, but some experience—"

"Physics, you say?" repeated Martin Elder, leaning toward me in excitement.

I nodded.

"Yes, sir—physics."

Both men leaned back, apparently in astonishment and relief and joy, if I read their faces aright.

"Well," said Hume, speaking for the first time, "that *is* fine. *Now* you'll understand."

Carcita looked at her father gravely.

"Do you think he is strong enough to listen, father?"

Elder smiled at her—then at me.

"I feel very strong," I answered. "And yet with what I've been through, I suppose I should be half dead, and weak as a link of sausage. But I'm not."

All three laughed. Carcita flushed again.

"Well," said she, "I didn't want anything to—to happen, you know—like with some of the others."

Elder put an arm about her shoulder affectionately, and smiled at me again.

"You'll understand very soon," he said to me. "And when you do you will be surprised; and, being a professor of physics, a little ashamed that you did not see at once. Carcita, it seems to me that you'll soon have that spoon worn out if you polish it any more. Take the things out, dear, and bring in a full outfit of my clothing when you come back. Then—but wait a moment—"

He turned to Hume.

"You marked the spot?" he questioned rather irrelevantly, it seemed to me.

His companion pointed to a white scrap on the floor near the further wall.

"I dropped my handkerchief, sir," he said.

"Good," answered Elder. Then he turned to Carcita again: "Please bring a white-marking crayon also, dear."

The girl glanced at me, then toward the wall, near which the handkerchief lay—paled slightly, and shuddered. Then she quickly left the room.

The father turned to me.

"You are a professor of physics," he said gravely. "I am glad, because then, as my friend just said, you will the clearer understand. You will know how you came here, where and what this 'here' is, and how you will go back. You will understand in

what way we are related to you, and our world to yours."

Once more I repeated to myself: I am neither dead nor mad—this is a dream. Good. Then if it be a dream, make the most of it. When you awaken you'll be in your own sick room with a head full of horrible commotion, and a body full of drugs. Here, in this dream, you're well, happy—and, purely incidentally, there seems to be a girl around somewhat like that ideal you've always had 'way back in your heart somewhere. Make the most of it. Take it as actual life—forget you're dreaming—and live.

And strange to say, as I thought this, I almost believed that I was not in a fantastic dream, but actually in another world. Such for the power of persuasive imagination!

"Well," I said half musingly as I glanced again out of the window, "this world is the same as mine in form—but it's been changed on the surface."

Elder nodded.

"Of course it's different—of course it's changed."

I looked him in the eye.

"Then you actually do know about my—my world?"

"Of course we know," he cried.

And Hume added quickly:

"That's where we go, you know."

"Why, yes," Elder explained; "it's where we go. It's almost over now, however, and in a few more centuries we'll all be there, and the thing will start over again for us—just as it always has."

"A bit mixed for me," I muttered.

"I'll explain," said he. "You understand vibration?"

I nodded.

"To some extent," I answered. "But tell me all so that I can clearly get it. I'm still a bit muddled mentally."

"Good," he went on. "In the first place know that our world and yours are the same. Your people and our people live on its surface at the same time, even in the same identical places at the same identical moment, unseen to each other. These fair fields and white dwelling houses occupy at this very moment space which at this

same identical moment is occupied by buildings erected by your people. They exist in the same space at the same time. Even as we sit here, it could be, it is possible under the laws of science, that another group of men may be holding the same relative positions in space, breathing the same air, their bodies—"

I interrupted.

"Oh, come now, sir," I cried. "Surely you don't mean that. You mean that we are now on another sphere identical in surface development and geographic features to the earth on which I was born, and lived on but yesterday."

He shook his head.

"No—you're on the same old Mother Earth."

"But here," I cried, "this is the big bay—there's old Tamalpais—these are surely the very slopes on which I've lived all my life. And yet you mean to say my friends are living right here, on the same slope, at this very moment—and yet that slope right now is even as I see it? You mean it's covered by a great city, and yet, too, by this beautiful park—at the same time—now? Bosh!"

I confess I lost patience a moment. It seemed too absurd.

Hume chuckled. Martin Elder smiled gravely, stood up, rubbed his temples thoughtfully a moment, then started to pace the floor.

"Others," he went on quietly, ignoring my rude exclamation; "others who came have said the same thing. Look here, my friend, you used to have—or wait, I'll put it this way. Your side has advanced to the aeroplane stage, has it not?"

I nodded.

"The air propeller," he went on, "becomes practically invisible at high speeds, does it not?"

"Simply because its blades turn so rapidly they make practically no impression on the retina of the eye," I returned. "You can't walk through it."

"Good," he said with a slight touch of irony, "I see you do know something of your science. But here, you know that all things can exist in three states: solid, liquid, gaseous. The commonest at hand: ice,

water, steam. One less common is mercury: freeze it into a hammer head and drive nails with it; at ordinary temperatures it is liquid, hence its name; and how do they get it from the ore?—by heating the ore, driving the quicksilver off as a vapor like steam, condensing the vapor in cooling tubes as one condenses water—and there it is, a metal, solid, liquid, gaseous. The same can be done with any metal if a high enough temperature can be attained. Iron is normally solid—heat it and it liquefies—heat it more and the iron will go off like steam from water, a vapor, a gas. What is the cause of all this? You say *heat* is. Good, and what is heat? You say it is a form of *vibration*. Very well, then, let us say that it is vibration which has changed the character of the iron. All matter we will say is composed of infinitely small particles, call them what you may. When these particles are at rest, the matter is solid. When at a certain rate of vibration they separate a bit, one from the other, and the matter softens, like butter under pressure of a knife. At a higher speed of vibration the particles are so far separated that the stuff runs into liquid form. Give a higher rate of vibration and the particles separate still further, and the liquid becomes a gas. What made the change—one thing, and one thing only, my friend, and that is *vibration*."

He paused. I nodded that I understood and approved.

"You cannot walk through a solid *aéroplane* propeller," he said, "but you can walk through liquid—or gas."

Again I nodded.

"Too hot?" I suggested.

"Truly it might be," he went on, "in some cases. Now, then, suppose that not only were the propeller whirling very fast, but each particle of it were vibrating at a great speed, too, of and in itself. Can you say, then, that you may not be able to walk through it and come out unscathed?"

I nodded again. It might be.

"I wouldn't want to try it, though," I muttered.

Hume grinned and his eyes danced.

"Neither would I," he said, "but I have seen something like it done. Three or four

hundred years ago they were showing tricks—great fun!"

"Three or four—what?" I whispered aside.

"You call 'em centuries, I fancy," he said. "Sh!"—pointing to Elder—"I'll tell you later."

I rather imagined he would. This was getting worse and worse. This young fellow—centuries—

"At any rate," the older man went on, "the thing has been done. Two solid-appearing materials, set vibrating in peculiar waves which you on your side may not have yet discovered how to generate, set vibrating as a whole, and in each minute individual particle can, we have long known, coexist in the same space. You know from your vision of the *aéroplane* propeller that at high speed it cannot be seen. You possibly did not know what we in our vaster experience have known for thousands of years, that these other peculiar vibrations will so affect matter that not only does it become invisible, but also as readily pervious as is the air itself. *We know* that—for our knowledge of natural science is as great compared even to yours, Gordon Bliss, professor of physics of some little year in the nineteenth century—far back at the dim dawn of what you call your wonderful civilization—as is your own knowledge compared to that of the anthropomorphous ape." Elder smiled wanly, and shook his well-shaped head. "Oh, you little, little people, you vain people, you and your boasted civilization and your glorious discoveries in science! You are but getting a start—but clinging desperately to the lowest rung of the ladder, like the ancient ape, likewise full of ambition, did hang to the limb of a tree by his tenuous tail. And your knowledge, compared to what there is yet to learn, even as is that ape's to yours! But forgive me," Elder went on quickly, earnestly, "forgive me. I cannot help it. We are at the end of things, friend Gordon Bliss"—he waved toward the window—"while you are at the beginning—at the beginning where I, too, and all of us here, will be again some day—and we little knowing, will be as ambitious, and as vain of our knowledge, and as proud of our deeds,

and as jealous of our rights, and in the beginning will shed as much blood over this ambition, and knowledge, and those rights—forgive me again, Sir Stranger, and I will finish quickly. But wait a moment more—here's your clothing—and, Carcita, did you find some crayon?"

"Yes, father," the girl returned as she deposited a small pile of stuff at the foot of my couch. She touched the top of it with a smile. "I think there's enough here. It's more than Gordon Bliss had when he first startled me so."

She smiled archly.

I decided at once that I liked the custom these people had of calling one by his full name. Also, the frank way in which Carcita alluded to my absolute nudity—and then I started, remembering that single distant flutelike note that I had heard when I first became aware of things in this world. I wondered—I resolved to speak about this at the first opportunity—with her.

Then I looked up at her.

"I wouldn't mind getting into these," I said with a smile.

"Oh," said Carcita with a toss of her head, "if you want to get rid of me—" And she left the room. But just as she turned through the door she glanced—quickly back, then flashed away when she saw I had caught the laughter in her eyes. I confess that at that moment I began to seriously contemplate staying in this world as long as it would hold me—providing, of course, that—but more of that later.

CHAPTER VII.

CHALK MARKS ON THE FLOOR.

I TURNED to find Martin Elder and Hume engaged seriously at the far side of the room. Hume was down on his knees, a piece of white chalk in his hand, marking off a large rectangle about the handkerchief he had placed there. Elder was carefully scanning the wall from ceiling down to baseboard. The younger man—what had he said about something he had seen hundreds of years before?—had finished quickly, then arose and stepped beside Elder. The latter whispered some ques-

tion, and Hume pointed up to the ceiling straight above the handkerchief, which still lay on the floor. Elder seemed to be endeavoring to ascertain some fact—and finally both shrugged their shoulders and turned to me.

"Do you recall which way you lay on the floor when we picked you up?" asked Hume.

Somewhat surprised by the question I answered quickly:

"The—the light was in my eyes," I stammered.

Elder turned quickly to Hume.

"Then he must have been with his head toward the wall, and his feet toward the opposite corner," he said. "That about it?" he questioned me again.

I nodded. "What on earth did they want to know that for? What good could that do them in their vast knowledge which Elder had so deeply attempted to impress on me?"

Hume dropped to his knees again and swiftly outlined a figure on the floor, lying in the rectangle, at about the angle with the wall that Elder had indicated.

Then the latter questioned me again.

"Did you seem to fall? Or were—"

Distinctly then I recalled the slight jar I had felt in that moment when the room had closed in upon me with such a rush.

"I felt a very gentle bump," I said.

Hume looked up at his companion.

"Couldn't have dropped more than a foot," he declared.

"Make it three," said Elder. Then, as though a new thought struck him he wheeled on me. "How high is the ceiling of your room—the room in which you lay sick?" he questioned.

Again I was surprised. What could these men be working out?

"About nine feet," said I.

Elder turned back to Hume.

"Make it five," he said, and Hume nodded, and left the room with just a smile at me.

The older man returned to my couch.

"Having a hard time getting into the clothes?" he queried.

"They're almost like ours," I said. "A little looser, and softer, and lighter color."

They were a blue-gray, just as were those of both the men—Carcita's clothing I had not noticed. "My"—I stretched myself—"I do feel gloriously well and strong—and hungry."

He smiled.

"Later," he said with an amused smile. "Do you understand now how our world and yours can exist together in the same space?"

"I think I can," I returned. "It's almost like solution, too, isn't it?"

"It's pure vibration," he said, shaking his head. "The reason you are here is because something set your whole body and every cell, every particle of it, in that peculiar vibration of which I spoke. And the vibration, speeding up, gradually made you visible to this world, and—"

I fairly shouted.

"Invisible in my own! So *that* is what happened to me there! That is why the doctor was so astonished, and my sister frightened, and the nurse put out of her senses, and all those friends of mine summoned to see me! Why I thought *they* were getting transparent, thought my eyes had gone bad, didn't know what to think! And all the time it was I—I—who was looking so queer to *them*."

"Exactly," nodded Elder. "And when your body had quite disappeared in your room there, it began to become visible in this—to all practical extent in another world."

"Then my own room at—at—home," I struggled to really comprehend, "is—is—in the same place—the same space as this—is—here?"

"That chalk outline on the floor"—he pointed to the marks Hume had made—"is roughly the outline of your bed."

"Good Lord!"

I looked about at the room. At that very moment Dr. Courtenay, and my sister, and the nurse, might still be blankly staring at the empty bed in which I had lain—hardly able to believe their senses. This room—this very space—I glared, I fancy, at Elder, and at the couch, and the other furnishings—I even walked over to the chalked space and cautiously swept my hand over and through where must lie in

that other world, across the borderland, my own good bed. I did it with a little thrill running through me—wonderingly, fearfully, and—in a sudden access of loneliness—almost hopefully. But my hand touched nothing—not even so light a sensation as I had felt when so short a time ago—it already seemed days—even as I disappeared in nothingness, my sister Charlotte had flung her arms about me in the vain effort to keep me there. Oh, poor girl, what horror had been hers when her arms so suddenly closed about vacant space, in which but a moment before she had felt my living presence!

I flung myself down on the couch and buried my head in my arms. A moment more and I felt Elder's hand on my shoulder. Then his retreating footsteps, pausing at the door. Then his voice calling—another answering—lighter footsteps approaching—whispering—his steps in retreat.

CHAPTER VIII.

CARCITA—AND HUME.

A CHAIR was drawn close to the couch and another hand dropped on my shoulder. What was there about that touch that thrilled me joyously, that cast over my fancied picture of friends and sister so warm and glowing a veil? What was the drifting fragrance in the air as from a sun-bathed blossoming garden? And why should my senses at once tell me: "Turn around and smile, for it is she? Don't be a fool, no matter if this is a unique and sudden feeling—turn around!"

I turned.

It was indeed Carcita—her lovely eyes two deep blue pools of tears.

Quickly she snatched away her hand from my shoulder.

"You grieve for—for—friends?" she hesitated.

I nodded dumbly.

"Dear ones?" she persisted.

"Almost as dear as any man could ever desire," I returned. "A sister—my sister Charlotte."

"Oh," she cried, clasping her hands, "Oh—a sister!"

I could have sworn that a note of relief was in her voice—though full indeed it was of pity.

"I—I am so sorry," she said. "My father said you felt badly. I wondered if—I if I could help."

I smiled sadly.

"By just being here you can help," I said. And then I, too, hesitated, not knowing exactly how to express my feeling. "I—I am here in a world that is my world, and yet not my world," I went on. "I might just as well be marooned out on another planet as be here. Heaven only knows whether I'll ever see my home again—be ever able to clear for my dear ones the horrible mystery they must now be in over me. And—I confess it—Miss—Miss—"

She leaned forward.

"That 'Miss' was done away with thousands of years ago," she said. "My name is Carcita Elder."

I took her hand, and she did not resist.

"I am glad that such is the custom," I said. "For I confess it, Carcita, even in the few hours I have been here, in your world, I feel so separated from all my kind—so lonely. I—I was glad when first you came in that you were here. And I am happy that I may call you as I would love to do—Carcita. With us in my world, you know, it brings us closer."

Carcita flushed and wiped her eyes. Then she answered softly, but withdrawing her hand:

"I am glad, too."

There was a moment's silence. Then Carcita said gravely:

"Do you feel better now?"

My answer was explosive.

"I do!" I cried.

And at that we both had to laugh.

From then on we were much together. And I am sincere when I say that I believe, despite the seemingly impregnable wall there is between us at this time of writing, that we will not long from now be together once more. I have ever been slow in matters regarding women. In the college life I have mingled socially with the best: family, beauty, intellectuality, womanliness, fire. Yet my work was always so absorbing, or perhaps I was ever so obsessed with my

work and with myself as I dreamed of a later Hall of Fame, that the next day the women I had met the night before had passed from my mind. My sister would come and tell me how such and such a girl felt so hurt because I had not known her—had looked right at her, then passed straight on. I had a reputation for snobbery when I was no snob at all, but simply so absorbed in other thoughts that I had neither ears nor eyes for aught but my hobby, my dream, my science. Thus have I, during my life in *my* world, been slow regarding the one great absorbing joy in life, the happy comradeship with a lovely woman. It is no wonder, then—and I say this not in excuse, but simply to explain what may seem a very precipitate enthusiasm on my part—that, when I was so suddenly drawn from my busy and sordid world into that other one of relaxation and beauty, my heart went out to the first girl I saw. I had no other attachments, no business to divert me, no science to obsess my very soul, no friend in whom I might confide—I was absolutely alone. And then I saw her—the dearest girl that ever dwelt on earth and made a man's heart flutter and his hand tremble and his voice break.

And I am going back—to her. That was promised.

My sister has since seen much in Dr. Courtenay—mutual fears over my extraordinary disappearance, mutual watching in my room had accomplished this. So in returning to that other unseen world, in returning to Carcita, who has promised me all that a woman can give—herself—I leave little sadness behind me.

And I will go back. Elder has shown me much—of wisdom of a thousand generations after our time—and I believe, I *know*, that I can make the change, break down the barrier, return to that blessed land and that thrice blessed girl.

Many things I discussed with Carcita besides the strangeness of my condition; many things besides the wonders of the land in which she lived—wonders to me, of course, and not to her. And I told her much, too, of our own world, and was surprised to see how much she knew of it already.

I inquired into this, and she told me that a certain group of men and women called the Council, or the Leaders, forming, I later discovered, as near to a religious and governmental body as these people had, had the power of "going over" to us, and that they brought back news of our people and our conditions.

"Isn't it horrible," she said, "that men should fight and kill as you are doing now?"

"But I thought as long as individuals will quarrel, nations would fight," I said.

She shook her head.

"The world is not divided into nations now," she said. "We are one great people, have one great language. There are not boundaries, no treaties, no commercial rivalries—we live happily together. You used to call this time the millenium, I think—and some of your philosophers quarreled much about its exact state, some even contending that there would be none, the world would go down in fire and blood. They were wrong, Gordon Bliss," she cried, her blue eyes flashing and her fists clenched whitely; "wrong, wrong, wrong! They did not *understand*. They did not *know*! Some day—and even now—a few of your dreamers hold it as the truth—some day they will know. But it will take years, thousands, tens of thousands of years, before they will attain to that perfection when they can rightly be said to understand fully—to know fully. I know not how long it was the books say that we were struggling to find the truth. And then when we found it, and it was ours, we used it but a while as a child may use a toy, and then we flung it aside. You will understand, Gordon Bliss, you will understand later, if my father will but tell you. And that he will—he will. I shall tell him that he must—and it must be done before you pass, before you pass back. Oh—it must—at once!"

And before I could so much as catch my breath she was up and away—and I was alone.

Yet almost, at once some one entered.

Tall and slender, yet strongly built withal, and clad in the loose garments of blue-gray such as I found that all men wear, he was a handsome, powerful-looking man. Yet his flashing eyes, and the lowered brows

and the tense, stern look on his face seemed almost to belie the goodness of man of which Carcita had just spoken.

It was Hume. René Hume, and his words were bitter from the first.

"Were I not sworn to Martin Elder," he gritted as he stood before me, "were I not under oath to the Leaders, and were it not needful that I respect the oath, I would kill you where you sit."

For a moment I froze. Then in a flash I saw that there was but one thing to do—sit quietly and hear him out. There must be some reason for his strange action, when before, with Elder in the room, he had been so smiling and gracious to me, and so eager in my behalf. I looked up as coolly as I could.

"It would be easily done," I said. "But why not wait till I go back. You would be rid of me, and have no conscience to bother you." Then I smiled humorously and cried: "Come now—what's the joke?"

His whole frame stiffened. He started to speak, then his lips drew tight. A moment thus he dramatically glared at me—then turned and stalked from the room.

I followed him with my eyes.

"Well," I gasped, "that's the strangest thing I've seen next to simply being here."

Then I heard Elder's voice and his—and the latter was again as smooth and calm as it had been when first I had heard it earlier in the day. But a moment they spoke, then the curtain parted and both come into the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CONSERVATION OF SPIRIT.

"MY daughter informs me that you wish to stay with us, Gordon Bliss," Elder said.

I nodded—and wondered at the man beside him, who stood at ease again, and smiled into my eyes. Was he playing me; or had he suddenly and unaccountably conceived of a great hatred for this stranger from another world?

"Then," Elder went on, "I must first tell you what there is to tell. You know now how you came to us. Know this, then,

that you will go back in the same way. You will be suddenly possessed with a subtle sound which will develop speed and fineness until every single atom of your body is vibrating in that peculiar manner that I have mentioned before. Then before you know it—this world will have dissolved, and you will reappear in your own. You understand all that?"

"I do," I said.

"Good," he said gravely. "Now, then, know also this, which is at the very foundation of things in life, which affects me as well as it affects you, which is the controlling factor in all our life and of all that lives. You have no doubt noted in my speech how often I refer to your world. Have you wondered why I did this—*how* I could do it? It is because we here know of your world even though you there do not even imagine ours. Some of us may voluntarily go into yours, whereas those of you who get into ours do so by the merest accident, and when they tell their tales beyond the wall, they are called imaginative artists, fools, or—conceived to have become madmen—are promptly clamped behind strong doors, to linger till they die. That impression I want to make—that *we* can see, and *you* cannot.

"We know thus all about your world, and the reason is simply this—when man dies here he goes there—to you—out of this world and into yours."

He stated this so simply and with such an air of matter-of-fact truth, that I gasped.

"What!" I cried. "You mean—"

"When our people pass from this side—they go to yours," he repeated.

"But—but—how?" I exclaimed.

He smiled—and so likewise did Hume beside him. I looked coldly on Hume—he smiled again. To tell the truth, I could not quite "get" the man. But Elder continued:

"There is a theory concerning the conservation of matter," he started.

"I know it," I said.

"And conservation of energy," he went on.

"Yes, yes," I cried.

"Then," he continued, "did you never think it possible that there might be an-

other great principle called the conservation of spirit?"

The idea burst on me like a bombshell. In the flash of its light I saw at once that there should be the principle on which man must finally base whatever philosophic view he held.

"The conservation of spirit!" I cried. "Is that—"

Again he calmly interrupted.

"We are the people," he said, "that come before you—and we go to you. Behind us the same thing has been done for unnumbered years. Before you it shall continue as long as—it may; that, how long, not even we can tell—but it will be as long, no doubt, as the sphere we are on may endure.

"Under the conservation of matter principle we know that matter is never lost. A tree may grow, die, decay, and go back into soil—and not an atom of it be lost. Your old time coal may burn to ashes—but none is lost—part is converted to gases, which in turn go into the atmosphere, form different combinations there; some remain there; some come back to earth with falling rain—and part remains as the residue. No matter is lost. The energy that was stored in that coal through the growth of the vegetation of which it is made to the enormous pressures which practically made it crystalline, comes out of the coal as heat, and turns engines, or warms and thereby energizes the human body. No energy is lost. And so we come to the last principle, which as yet you people, all struggling to understand, and what most of you, with a shrug of your shoulders, say is incomprehensible to mere man, and hence not worth bothering about. Pitiful humanity—as if life itself, and the very essence of it, were not worth bothering about!

"The conservation of spirit! Listen! You see before you, and out the window, a dying people. We have solved life in all its vagaries—except one which I shall mention later. We know all that you ever dreamed of knowing—we have had our engines, our mysteries, our science, far beyond anything of which your world, in its wildest flights of imagination, has ever fancied. We have lived for a hundred thou-

sand years and more, and have the wisdom of those centuries of learning in our brains, and in our bodies. We *have* done our share in life—we are satisfied. And now—we are a dying people. And we wish to be. And,” continued Elder, “even as we die, and in the exact number, do you live. As our people diminishes, yours increases. A passing here—is a birth there.”

A moment I stared.

“The conservation of spirit!” I said. “But,” I went on, “how about those who die among us?”

Martin Elder nodded.

“They, too, go on to another world within our own,” he said gravely.

“What!” I cried. “You mean the thing is endless. You mean the thing runs in cycles—that there is always one behind, and one ahead—”

“They are infinite in number,” he nodded.

“And all—*here*?”

“All here,” he repeated.

“But—”

“In different periods of vibration—different types of vibration. Of those we do not know—we have pierced the one behind us, and yours, the one ahead. Beyond that we know little, except that there are probably a myriad of others, too.”

“In this same space?”

“Yes,” he said, “in this same space. A goes to B, B to C, C to D, D to E, and so on, *ad infinitum*—cycle upon cycle of another form of energy—human energy—the energy of spirit. Oh”—he ran on almost casually, for it was an every-day matter to them, of course, though to me it was beyond my vainest imaginings—“we worked it out long ago, long ago. We knew of it, and had learned the secret long before the Mongols of your time had found their way across the Behring Straits and made your west coast Indian population. Oh yes, we lived and gloried and were proud—but now the end is in sight—a few more thousand years and another people will take our place—another people composed of the same spirit energy, just as another tree grows out of the decaying trunk of the old.”

“How do you know the end is coming?” I asked.

He smiled again.

“Oh, we know,” he said.

“But how?” I persisted.

“Did you have fraternal orders on your side?” He started—then ran on: “But of course you have.”

I nodded.

“As in Masonry and others,” he went on, “is there not a new mystery with each step?”

I nodded again.

“But is not that mystery a simple theory when finally you arrive?”

I had to admit that it was.

“Well,” he said, “it’s a similar situation here. Some day your people will know that your time has come, too—and from that time on their number shall diminish. It is as sure as day and night, and as the day follows the night. Even day and night themselves were mysteries until in the progress of science man came to understand them. And so has it been with this thing of which we speak. We have gradually, step by step, come into our present knowledge. As with matter and energy—so with spirit—soul, if you please to call it such. Do not mistake me—I do not mean that in time we come to know who and what we individually were in the cycle before us—that we do not know. It is simply that the soul or spirit energy of this earth is a fixed quantity—and the eternal balance of the life in these cycles is based upon this fixed quantity. One cycle increases in exact number as another decreases. And the spirit energy of those who die early in that increasing cycle goes on to the next increasing one. And from that to the next—from this one to that which follows—and on, and on, and on.”

He paused.

“Well,” said I, “then you have at the two extremes, in the one case a cycle that is at its very start, its very inception, you might say—and at the other end a cycle in which the population of the earth has been reduced to one lone man—and he going fast?”

Elder nodded. “Exactly,” he said.

“And in the center, between these two extremes, are two cycles whose populations are practically the same?”

Again he nodded.

"And then one of those two gets the start on the other—and the thing commences again with two other cycles in balance?"

"Exactly," affirmed Elder. "I am glad you understand. It is quite simple, as is any great mystery when once you do understand."

I smiled.

"I do understand how it all is—where I am, why I am here. But—well, it will have to sink in a while, I think, before I really comprehend, before I really get the bigness of it all. It has come rather suddenly, you know. I still feel a bit dazed."

I passed my hand over my forehead.

CHAPTER X.

QUESTIONS—AND REVELATIONS.

ELDER chuckled and turned to his companion.

"Just like the last," he said.

The smile remained on Hume's face, but I thought it froze a bit—and the light that flickered momentarily in his eyes I did not like.

He answered coolly.

"Yes," he said, with a glance at me, "just like the last."

I pretended to ignore the half hid menace in his tone, and turned to Elder.

"You said before there had been others?" I hinted.

"Very, very few," said he. "And they have always been welcome."

Hume nodded.

"Very welcome," he said with the accent, I felt in the wrong place. What could ail the man? Had he conceived for me, so forlorn and lonely a stranger, a sudden consuming hatred? And if he had, what had I done that would bring him to it? Or was he playing with me? And if the latter, was it in mockery, or in the spirit of true fun; and would we laugh heartily together over it in the end? For some reason I began to feel that we would not. There was not the slightest hint of laughter in his eye—and he played his part too well when Elder was with us—too well.

"But now," Elder went on more gravely, "my daughter just reminded me of a thing of which I had intended to speak to you at first—but of which, in my interest in your wonder and your questions, I found no time before." He turned to Hume. "René," he said, "if you do not mind I wish you would see to the construction of that support."

He pointed to where the marks had been made about where I had been found.

Hume started, as though he had been asleep. But this, I fancied, he had not been.

"Five feet, sir?" He repeated the instruction Elder had given him earlier in the day.

Elder nodded.

"Five feet," he said. Then added: "And let it be sufficiently strong—for despite the illness through which our new friend has passed he appears a well built and heavy man."

Hume nodded.

"As you say, sir," he said and left—left to build a support, evidently to be made some five feet high, and erected over the very spot on which I had been discovered. I wondered what the object of this support could be. I wondered again at the meticulous care with which Elder and Hume had measured and calculated when, whispering together, they had stood over the rectangle chalked on the floor. I wondered again at menace which lurked ill hid in Hume's every action and look and word which had connection with me. I wondered again as I looked out upon the green and marble-white beauty of the sweeping lands before me which but a day before I had known as the Berkeley Slope, blotched then with the artificial structures and habitations of man—now so cool and free and simple and glorious, and so natural.

I could not be dreaming. It was all here. It was. It existed. It was true—all of it.

And I understood how it all was true, how it could be true—how it *was*.

But *why* it was thus—that, in later questions, I discovered even these latter day people, in all the inherited wisdom of ten thousand generations, did not know, and

moreover had long ceased to attempt to know. That was one question in the circling routine of life that they had ceased to worry about. It *was*—and they knew that much. It *was*—and they knew how it could be so. But *why*—that one great absorbing query that had been ever present in the minds of the men of my time was a forgotten question in theirs.

All the world was changed even as was this one familiar slope, and the great bay of San Francisco, and the rounded slope about. Long ago had the surface been crowded with swarming humanity. Long ago had the earth's power of life-support been taxed to the uttermost. Long ago had man's struggle with man, and man's struggle with earth, ceased. Long ago had the maximum in this strange cycle—so shiningly new, and yet so abysmally ancient—been reached, run for the fraction of a heart beat along its level course, then without remorse, without reluctance, but with peace and joy and contentment, gently started on the downward slope toward the final day. *This final day!*

I took my eyes from the window-framed picture and discovered Elder's intent on mine.

He nodded gently; then, as though reading my thoughts, he spoke.

"The end is near, and we are glad. All are glad—all. There was a time, a thousand years ago, when all were not glad. A great section, all of Africa and South Europe and the South and East of Asia were not glad—and they revolted. And they protested with powers that they had dug out of ancient books, and of which the Council of Leaders itself had but a dim remembered thought. And the council was forced one day to use *its* power—and in that one day was Africa swept absolutely bare of living things—absolutely bare. And Southern Europe and the rest bowed before the council and said: It shall be as you will. And to this day there has been no murmur of such rebellious thought again. It was like a great plague—purifying. It was as a great sickness in a single man, a protest against a new scheme of things by all the forces that within that man would still continue for the old. The

impurities burst forth—the man was healed and made new. 'The old order changeth' even as your poet has writ—and the new hath come. Each individual has agreed, body and soul—and so has all mankind agreed—and is content. Nay," cried Elder, "not only content, but joyful that it may be. For even as do those of your age when they reach declining years, so also does a race, a people, *all mankind*, welcome the surcease that final oblivion does bring. Life is truly glorious—but when life becomes simply a matter of will—"

I started—and interrupted.

"Life—a matter of will!" I cried.

Elder nodded again.

"Of will," he said; "of mind. And when all that man need do to live is simply to *will* to live, then—"

I interrupted again. This was a bit too much for my rattled theories of matter. Mind and things of concrete substance were not in my day believed by many to have more relationship than does the electric current to the chemicals which in a storage battery produce it. The battery in my day made the electricity—or converted its chemical energy into electricity. And the brain of man in my day was thought simply to create currents of thought by almost similar chemical action.

One could not conceive then of the electricity generated by that battery as controlling the functions of the battery itself. And by the same reasoning how could thought control the organic brain battery and the body feeding it—which had of and in itself created that thought?

Utter nonsense! The mental meanderings of over-stimulated imaginations—the idle vaporings of individuals with nothing else to occupy their minds—the subtle schemings of cunning cultists whose desire to be seen and heard and gather unto themselves the riches of the earth had gone to their heads and made them mad!

Matter *made* mind. How could mind control matter?

"Simply to will to live!" I cried as in a flash these thoughts ran through me. "Simply to will—"

Elder smiled.

"You will believe me?" he questioned

gently. "You will accept what I say as truth—you see before you the land that once was, and even now is, your own home, your own university of learning—your world—and yet also mine? You will believe?"

What could I do but answer that I would believe? With my own eyes I could see with but a turn of my head the change that time—vast time—had wrought. And the theories of my own age—so near and yet in the eyes of these people so distant in the centuries past—had been such as to convince me, here seeing the change, that it *might be*—that, indeed, it *was*. My science, my dry, matter-of-fact science, which had been the primal cause of my present predicament, had hinted to me of at least the beginnings of the theory which in the present fact of this living cycle in which was showed itself so clearly as a great, vibrant truth.

Truly, a *vibrant* truth, I recollected with a slight shudder. And then an appalling thought came to me—suppose—suppose that cursed shivering should come over me again and I—without Carcita—should drift back out of this soft, declining era into my own home circle again—forever lost—forever! I shuddered again—and then felt Elder's hand on mine—and the force of his glowing eyes on my own dimming ones.

"Gordon Bliss!" he cried, anxiety in his voice. "Gordon Bliss—we want you here yet a while—a little longer—a little longer. There is nothing to fear here—there is no such thing here as fear. And we can help you—will help you. Just compose your thoughts and be content—and rest when I tell you that all who have come before have stayed with us for at least three days, and this is but your first. All—all—I say—three days. Fear not that the change will come. And"—he lowered his voice instantly and his mind seemed to force its power and truth on mine even as his deep eyes held my own—"and never fear but that when you do go, as go you must, we can, and will, give you that knowledge which will enable you to return." He nodded gravely. "To return—if you but will it—to return."

I stared.

"When René left the room—when I sent

him away," he went on, "it was because my daughter, my little Carcita, begged that I speak privately with you, and give you the knowledge that will enable you, do you but *will* to do so, to return and live out your life with us, and"—his eyes twinkled—"perhaps with her."

My heart pounded.

With her! With Carcita! Then she—I must admit that for the first time, over a woman, I felt a warm, and I confess, a pleasant flush mounting my cheeks and forehead.

Elder nodded.

"It is our way!" he said. "The woman has the right to confess her feeling for the man, even as in your near-cave-man world it was still held the Godgiven right of the male. As if it were not the woman who should not have the right to choose the man whose children she must suffer torture to bear! Oh, Gordon Bliss, I may be far from the subject we were discussing—but is not your world a petty world, indeed? So vain of its boasted civilization—yet still speaking of woman as a piece of property to be purchased with the promise of food and clothing and shelter—and forcing her to make public the disgrace into which she unwittingly fell when that promise was broken. Forcing her to go before a group of curious men and callous women—and expose her very heart, and all its intimacy. Yes, thanks to what power there is that controls our destiny, humanity has awakened, and she who bears humanity's burden has long since come into her own."

My mind drifted back to my own cycle. Had I not seen the beginnings of this change? And would I not—did I still cherish the male reluctance of my old world toward allowing femininity its right—would I not, in this world with Carcita's vision before me, welcome the change that gave her the right, the prerogative, to choose from all men—me?

"Your daughter—" I said gently.

Elder nodded.

"She chooses," he said.

For a moment I fell silent. Things had happened so quickly! A few hours back! And now a new life, a new vision—and the girl—the girl.

Then a strange thought from out my old world forced itself into speech. I was thirty-two years old.

"I am grateful," I said. "Never before has my heart been touched by love—and I confess to you, sir, Carcita's father, that in these few moments I have been with you I have come to love your daughter. Yet but a question—it is our custom. I am thirty-two years old. Carcita—"

I paused.

Elder smiled.

"Old world prejudice. You mean—is Carcita not too young to know her own mind, and you are the gentleman who would take no advantage of childish impetuosity? Or do you question whether she be older than you—and so in your old world prejudice not fit to be your wife—because greater in experience and knowledge, and perhaps in sheer will and power, and that, in a woman, men of your time always feared—covertly, unspokenly—but feared."

I flushed.

"I love Carcita—" I stumbled.

Elder's hand pressed mine again.

"I saw that," he said. "And so did Hume."

"What!" I cried—a great light breaking in on me.

Elder went on gravely:

"I, too, saw what René has tried to conceal. Know that he has long loved my daughter—and confessed it. But know also that Carcita, liking him, would yet not consent to marriage. And now René, seeing you and her ready to fall into each other's arms, can but badly hide his emotion—and perhaps, were it not for a certain power I, with other members of the council wield, he would contemplate doing you bodily harm. It was for that reason that Carcita came so quickly to me—for she had seen, too; and René had spoken."

A moment he paused. And I smiled within myself. I had ever been one to enjoy a known danger. I had ever been one to dislike a mystery. Yet so perverted was that dislike, so keen that enjoyment, that when the two came together in even the slightest connection they obsessed me body and soul until the one was solved, the other met. I had not, in my professional mat-

ter-of-fact blindness to things really human, comprehended that Hume's hatred was due to the fact he, too, loved Carcita. My training had not been that way. My eyes did not see things in that light. My life was of things concrete—and love was abstract. At least, then, when I had fallen from my plane of study to observe momentarily in some church the culmination of a friend's love affair, I believed it so. Now—but, of course, now, with Carcita, things are different. Love did not seem quite so—abstract.

So Hume—or René, as I now mentally called him in the familiarity with which one views a rival in affections—so René was jealous. And were it not for the council, whatever that council were, he would cut my heart out. Good! The mystery is solved. I would meet the danger, if there were any danger!

Now then—

As if he had read my thought Elder resumed:

"Your old world prejudices—" he chuckled. "You are thirty-two years old, eh? And you fear that Carcita is perhaps too young to know her own mind—or too old to be your life mate. Know, Gordon Bliss, that neither of your fears have any basis. Carcita is a mature woman, in body and in mind. And she is, too, still young enough to suit your old-time mind, despite the fact that you are only thirty-two years old, and she is one hundred and sixty-five!"

"What!"

I stared—rigid, cold.

"A hundred and sixty—"

I gasped.

"Carcita—one hun—oh, nonsense, sir—you play with me—"

I gave a start of amazement. Then as Elder gravely shook his head I recollected something he had said earlier in the day, something, too, that poor old René had mentioned. Something they had seen hundreds of years ago—or was it thousands? With the utter strangeness of all my surroundings I had allowed this mention of centuries to pass lightly and unquestioned by. They had been mentioned but as a decade with us—and spoken of as tamely. Had something, in the vast play of time, changed

man's body, man's mind, so that—no, no, utter nonsense!

And yet Elder had affirmed to me but a short time back that he told naught but truth. And seeing his eyes, hearing the power in his voice, feeling the supreme confidence that emanated from him even as does light from the surface of the sun, and viewing that scene from my seat by the great window, of the land that was mine, and yet not mine—how could I help but believe?

"This is no dream," I mused; "it is reality."

I turned from the window back to Elder.

"I will believe," I said.

CHAPTER XI.

WILL TO LIVE—AND LIVE!

"IT is the truth," affirmed the man again. "I will believe," I repeated.

Elder looked at me gravely for a moment. Then:

"You in your world, even now after the hideous purification through which it has just gone, are at the very threshold of the truth of which I speak. Even now do your thinkers—religious and scientific—dimly perceive this truth. True, they do not yet comprehend it, do not yet grasp it in its entirety—but they have touched it, have tripped upon it, and will again, until, step by step, they pass over the threshold and up the never-ending staircase that leads to the life condition in which even now we exist.

"It will not come at once—this truth. It is not a thing to be gained in its full completion, for it is never completed—and like time itself, it never can be completed. This truth grows, develops, matures, without even reaching full strength, full powers, full maturity. It is like civilization itself, a thing comparative, never absolute. Suppose, Gordon Bliss, professor of physics in the university of the West—which is as unseen to us even as what that window shows us here is unseen to your world and your people—suppose that you take a yard measure and lay it on the table. Suppose, then, that you make a mark half-way from either end of that rule. Suppose,

then, you made a mark splitting one of those halves in half. Then another, cutting the last part in half, then another splitting the last space, and so on, and on, and on. You know that, continue as you may, to split the remaining distance in two parts, you will gradually approach the end of the ruler—and yet never reach that end. Always, always will a small part be left—no matter whether that part becomes so small, the space so narrow, that it is unseen by the naked eye, unseen by the most powerful microscope, yet still if you only take the half some will be left. You may come so close to the very end, that to all intents and purposes you have actually reached it—but actually you have not. Some, half of what you marked off, remains.

"Thus you can *approach* the end of the ruler by halving the remaining halves—but bear the truth in mind—you *can never reach that end*.

"And so," continued Elder after a slight pause, "so it is with the great truth which in a moment more I will simply state, and of which Carcita wished me to tell. We know the truth, but not all of it. We are approaching a thing which we can never actually reach. And yet, though we can never reach that end—we do actually enjoy all the fruits that that end can bring—just as actually, by halving that simple yard stick, one may actually come, to all practical purposes, to its end."

Here Elder paused again. I stared him in the eyes—the eyes of still young maturity, yet eyes in which lurked a hidden presence that bespoke knowledge, and profound confidence in that knowledge. They were young, sparkling, alert—but ancient in wisdom. I took in his whole figure as he paced now up and down the room. He was tall, lithe, erect, vigorous. He wheeled to me—and the freshness of his clear-cut features, the delicate texture of his skin were those of a man of my own age—of maturity, but blooming youth and ebullient health. I had not judged his age before—but I doubt, now that I think of it, that had it not been for the slightly grayed hair at his temples, and the aura of great knowledge that ever surrounded him, I would never have taken him to be the father of Carcita. I had

never known a man of thirty-five to have a daughter of twenty—and to all appearances, and in action and in voice, Elder was not a day over that age—thirty-five—nor Carcita a minute over twenty.

With a clear-cut exclamation he resumed his story.

"Ha!" he cried. "How slow it was to start. Yet you—your people—your side that even now has the great university, that even now smothers the fair earth with its dwelling and its market places, that even now commits wholesale murder to satisfy the ambitions of a few who have trampled their way to power and eminence—even you are on the verge of this truth. You see—and yet are blind. The step is in sight—yet you hesitate to believe that the threshold and the stairs beyond will hold your weight. Hold your weight? Ah, the pettiness of the human mind! The fear with which it views, distantly, a new idea! The truth is there—*there!* And yet even as we of our cycle did, so will you—and progress will be slow—slow—as even with us. And yet"—here Elder eyed me significantly—"and yet for a few of your people—a very few, yet enough to give hope for all—this truth will come to full comprehension, and the practice to full actuality."

Elder paused before me and leveled his finger.

"Know, Gordon Bliss, that this whole thing is simply mathematics—and body and mind. My daughter Carcita has lived one hundred and sixty-five years—yet bears still the fresh bloom of youth. I—but my age I must withhold until I tell you all, and you see how clear and simple the whole thing is. I must not tell you now. I want you first to see, and see with your mind, and believe.

"First, remember the advances in knowledge of the human body and its functioning that are even now made in your side, among your people, living right here, and now. Consider what you call your modern surgery, your inoculation, your preventative medicine. Recall all your devices in sanitation—the simple cleanliness broadcast across the once foul face of good old Mother Earth. You have drained swamps, and malaria has vanished. You have vaccinat-

ed, and a pox-marked man is the exception instead of the rule. You have constructed closed drains, have deprived the fly of its places of breeding, have placed a combative preventative in the blood of crowded men—and the dread typhoid epidemic is a ghost of your past, not a relentless murderer in the homes of your present. One by one have you conquered plagues, one by one have you overcome the natural weakness of man and given him the power within himself to fight off the ravages of disease. And one by one, Gordon Bliss, and it is as certain as one and one make two, will all illness, all disease, be eliminated from man's life of your time even as it was from ours.

"And then—then will come the time when man's body, free of all ills, purified of all disease, properly and cleanly fed and nourished and cared for, will have a new birth. Then will come a time when your physicians, those who fight against its troubles, will have the time, the thought, the confidence, to study how to keep man's body at highest efficiency for the longest possible time—*for all time!*"

I interrupted.

"You mean," I said, "they will have time actually to attempt, scientifically, to prolong life?"

Elder nodded.

"To prolong the average life," he affirmed. "To increase the average longevity of man. We did it—and you can, and will, do it, too. Ah, if you could but see it all, and do it in a day. But, no, no—like dividing the little ruler, it must come step by step, and always approach the end—*approach*—but never reach. It took us time—it will take you time. Yet, as I said, a few of your people may even now—but of that I cannot say, cannot promise. Yet it has been done—it has been done.

"But, friend," he ran on rapidly, "sanitation, surgery, purification of the body alone cannot prolong man's life more than a few little years. Something else must enter, and take control. And that something else, Gordon Bliss, is what I spoke of some time ago—the mind. And when the mind, the brain, comes into its own, and man by his own thought, conscious and

unconscious and subconscious, whatever it may be called, controls his bodily functions and even the functioning of his brain, then will the staircase be reached, the real climb toward real life, and real living, commence.

"For countless ages in each cycle has man come to bodily end within a definite number of years. When one lived to be a hundred he was placed among the wonders of the world, and heralded as a marvel, and advertised by a thousand fakers as the living example of the powers of some potent panacea. Man himself spoke of his 'allotted time'—fool that he was to even think that his time was allotted! Man himself would say that when he had come to his 'three-score and ten'—he slowly would fade away—fool again, I say, even to think that thought—fool to dream that his organic functioning, and his bodily powers, should start to diminish or decay simply because they had done well for a certain short period of time. Man himself from his very childhood, and prompted by the example of his ignorant parents, and by their very words and advice and cautioning and warnings would speak of the day when he would be 'an old man!' Fool, he! And fools, his parents! And thrice fools all humanity and its diminishing background of doting forefathers!

"From childhood has man said to himself, 'Some day I will be old—some day I will die! With the thought in mind that children will be a comfort during 'his declining years,' he and his wife have brought babes into the world, and injected into these unfortunate innocents from the very second of their conception, the diabolic bacillus of that unnatural belief, 'I will some day grow old and die—and my child will some day grow old and die.' And they *do* grow old, man and child; and they *do* die.

"Thus through the inherited conscious thought of countless generations has it become a fixed principle in man's mind that when he has come to a certain age he will go into decline and finally die. And through the incessant impact of this conscious thought upon his subconscious, it has become a very part of his subconscious, a very part of his body and his soul and his mind. 'I will some day grow old—and die,' had

become part of him, of his every atom, his every cell of flesh and bone and blood. And consequently in the process of metabolism, of the cellular change that makes to revivifying and regenerating the individual body—this thought was constantly present.

"Gordon Bliss, think logically, think sanely. Is there any reason under the sun, is there any real basic known reason given by your study of physics, your general knowledge of biology, of the human body, why, once maturity is reached, the cell change of the body should not continue in all its perfection for years without end? Properly fed, properly cared for, is there any reason why the processes of metabolism, these processes which develop a new cell for each cell broken down by physical or mental action, these processes which constantly renew worn parts of our body, should not continue on and on in all the perfection and vigor which is theirs for the few years directly following the cessation of growth? Is there any known or conjectured reason based on cold, hard science, and not antiquated philosophy, which declares positively that the new cell taking the place of the old should not be *just as good* as the old? And if each new cell is just as good as the worn one which it replaced, and the process goes on as it logically should, indefinitely, is there any reason why the human body, properly cared for, should not live on forever?

"Ah, you little people, you small thinkers! Even you, believing the truths I tell you, still wonder that such can be—that indeed *such is*—and I, before you, a living example of that truth.

"Why is it, Gordon Bliss, that in your time, among your people, these processes of physical rejuvenation are not perfect? Why is it, Gordon Bliss, that you who have conquered bodily ailments to so great a degree, do not live on, and on, and on, in youth and health and confidence—even as do we whom you see here—even as do we who *know*?

"Even as I hinted, the thing is simple. Rid the mind, the conscious mind, the subconscious mind, to put it harshly, of the thought of dying. And the thing is done. Evacuate the mind, the body, of all thought of declining years, all thought of bodily decay, all thought that because man

always *has* died, that he therefore always *shall* die—for that is false and evil logic, and means death and destruction for all men. Rid the mind of all thought of age limits, of dim boundaries in the years of each individual life, which once reached, mean that the end has come for the life of that individual body. Replace those ancient superstitions by a new philosophy—the *philosophy of living* and *not the philosophy of dying*—and what will occur?

"Start a thought propaganda in your own self that you can live, will live, shall live, as long as you properly feed and cleanse your body—and even as the day follows the night you *shall* live. Teach every atom of your body, every organ, every cell, that it may continue on indefinitely to perfectly function—and it shall. Think never of decay, think never of death—for there should be, there is, in the logical order of nature, no such thing as decay. You have a mind—use it! You have a perfect machine in your body—care for it. Science and mind—those two in combination—will achieve for your people just what it has achieved for us. And your people, too, shall come to be even as are we—to all intents and purposes, to all practical consequences—immortal!"

Elder paused again at my side, and looked deep into my eyes.

"My daughter, as I said before," he went on slowly, "has lived one hundred and sixty-five years—yet she is even as a girl of twenty. And I, Gordon Bliss, have seen the passage of thirty-five centuries—and yet I, before you, appear to be and actually in body am, about thirty-five years old. Astounding? I do not wonder that, with your old world mind, you gasp, and stare. Yet as old as that I am, and my daughter, as I have said.

"Oh, it took long! It took thousands of years, thousands of generations to rid us of all the old thoughts—but in time we did. A few ousted them at once—and became marvels in their age. Then man began really to think! Generation followed generation! Each child born heard more of life—and less of death. Each child born held more confidence that did he but care for himself, and think carefully, and forget

the old time ideas, and *will to live*—he might live, he *could* live. And then came a time when even the word 'death' was half forgotten, and man's mind, both his conscious, and the great pool in which the current of his conscious flowed—his subconscious, which is forever alive, awake, alert—*knew* that he could live, that he *would* live, *as long as he willed to live*.

"Thus it was. At first, as men were weak in this belief, the average life of man went up perhaps a year each century. Then it leaped up, and up, and up—in geometrical progression—with bounds almost unbelievable, until the average life was over a thousand years. You see how simple this would be; and how as man looked back over a hundred generations, and saw how during that time the average life had gone from say fifty-five years to one hundred and five, he would gain greater confidence that the future would shortly double that, and then in time even that—and on, and on, and on—until practically there came to be no limit. It *had* been—therefore it could be. And I before you, young, healthy, vigorous, in fuller possession of my bodily and mental powers than are you yourself—am, as I said, over thirty-five centuries of age. And that, though it seems vast and almost terrible to you, and unbelievable but for the simple logic of the thing and the examples we in ourselves do furnish, is still nothing to the infinity of all time, is yet nothing to the years in which I still may live.

"Do not mistake me—I do not say I am immortal. I am not. We have accidents, as well as you. We do, when tired of life, *will* to die, and so pass on—and add our bit to the spirit force of your own cycle. We are not immortal, are not perfect—any more than is our civilization. But even as by the process of halving remainders of that yardstick you may approach and to all practical purposes reach the end of the stick—so do we approach immortality, and to all practical purpose, do live forever—until, in time to come, we *will* to pass on.

"And you, too, in your cycle"—here Elder paused gravely again, and once more leveled eyes and finger at me—"you, too,

are even now on the threshold of this great truth. Even now are your practical scientists, your philosophers, your metaphysicians, your students of the human body and the human mind, advancing the first foot that when once planted will take man the first great step toward the new life. Man, man"—Elder paused again—"do you not remember that centuries before your own, but in your own cycle, you were promised that some day immortality would come to all the world? And has it not come to ours? And can you say that it will not come to yours some time in the dim remoteness of time ahead of *you*? And to some men—even now?"

I nodded gravely—for indeed, what with my scientific training, Elder's story, and the very example he himself furnished, what else could I do but believe? The man had made no missteps in his argument. I could easily see how, with the advances we of our time had already in one short century made in sanitation, preventative medicine and surgery, all ills of the human body might be eliminated. And I could easily see, too, how, though it took centuries of time, the undercurrent of thought ever present in man of to-day, that since man has always died at a certain average age, he therefore always must die, could gradually be ousted from us—from body, mind, and soul. And I could easily see, too, how once this evil thought, this negative idea, this insidiously sapping propaganda working within us and against us, was ousted, and likewise all bodily ailments through modern science entirely eliminated—man could live just about as long as he wished. And that, as Elder casually added in reflective afterthought, was as long as any one might desire!

My only thoughts now—except for a trifling conjecture at what René Hume might yet do, and the natural wonder at the care with which Elder and he had marked off the place on which I had been discovered, and of the structure they evidently were going to erect over it—were of two vital things.

The first of these, I must admit it, was of Carcita.

The second was of my sister and the

stricken friends I had left at home—whom, even now, invisible, unsensed in any way, were yet probably not ten steps away.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TERROR OF BEING ALONE.

I WONDERED, as Elder paced the room, what would happen to me if I were forced back into the vibration of my old life—and had to leave Carcita. I wondered sadly what would happen to my dear sister and my good friends were the horror of my unbelievable disappearance let go unexplained.

Elder had, indeed, promised that I would go back to my own people. Well and good. He had also promised that he would arrange things so that I could come back again to his world and to Carcita. Well and good, also. But—suppose I could not break the invisible barriers down and return to my home; suppose that once in my home, Elder's promises could not for some inexplicable cause beyond his power be carried out, and I should be stranded forever beyond the reach of the dear girl whom I loved. Stranded forever, separated forever—and by a huger and less easily surmountable wall than that of infinite space itself. Marooned as on another sphere. God! The cold sweat broke out upon me as I sensed the almost incomprehensibly vast guard that kept man of my own cycle from seeing and feeling the presence of man of the cycle in which I now lived and breathed.

I stared out of the window across the glistening bay at the hills that flanked the Golden Gate. The great glistening castle-like structures dotted on the green slopes, the massy clusters of darker foliage beneath and about them, the unsmirched and smokeless blue above, the sun sparkling waters at their feet—this was *my* bay, *my* hills, *my* land, *my* sky—yet *not mine*. Under my very eyes spread another velvety and slowly dropping plain; here were other and strange structures wherein dwelt these people whose wisdom was so great and whose gift from nature so bountiful, there on the dancing waters were the rising islets,

villa-dotted—and these were *my* sloping plains and *my* islands—*yet not mine*.

Something was different—so greatly different that, recalling all that Elder had in so short a time recounted to me, I felt my brain awirl, and sank my head in my hands—for the sudden blackness that had covered my eyes was as full of terror as of pain—and a great fear, utterly ununderstandable, was on me.

Dimly I wondered if I were going back to my own cycle—and dimly I struggled against it. Dimly I heard Elder's voice, lowered now, saying into my ears a strange formula which I may not, can not, *dare* not, give or tell or even hint to any man on earth in my cycle or any other cycle. Dimly I sensed what this direction was—the almost, yes, the actually sacred formula of chemicals and of mind control by use of which I might, when in my own world, subject my body to the vibration which would send me back into this. I remember muttering thanks as best I could—then dimly felt myself picked up, carried gently away, lifted to some height. Then consciousness gave way and I knew no more. I awoke as if from a sleep. I feared to open my eyes. Everything about me was quiet.

That it was daylight the glow of my own eyelids affirmed. Then a breath of delightful fragrance struck my nostrils—and feeling dimly that this was not the odor of my own cycle I ventured to look about me—and sighed with relief.

At the same time at my side, and seeming below me, came a cry of gladness—and I turned and smiled, for the voice was that of Carcita. I drew a great gulping sob—I had not yet “gone back.” Elder's fear and my own, had been in vain—I was still in the strange land of wisdom and age and youth and life and—love.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE—AND FEAR.

I TURNED—yet did not see the girl. I seemed on a height of some kind. I sat up.

“Careful, Gordon Bliss!” warned Carcita. “Don’t fall!”

I was indeed careful as I viewed my situation.

“Is this what René made?” I questioned, looking down from the five foot platform on which I was sitting.

The girl nodded.

“Careful!” she warned then, as I essayed to leap down. “It wasn’t quite finished when father called out for it—and it’s a bit rickety and might collapse. But oh—they had to use it anyway—*had* to.”

I crawled carefully down, and with Carcita’s aid slowly made my way to the couch by the great window. I glanced out—yes, the same strange surface on the same familiar landscape. I was still here.

“Oh,” cried Carcita. “Oh, you—you feel—well, all right? You—”

I took her in my arms.

“Dearest—” I whispered, “I thank God I am still here—with you. I—I feared—”

Her heart beat against mine, and her arms tightened about me convulsively. Awkwardly I attempted to quiet her sobbing—as awkwardly indeed I must, being but a tyro at love. Yet strangely enough Carcita calmed, and in a moment more raised her tear stained face for our first kiss.

Ah, will I ever forget the ecstasy, the supreme heart bursting happiness that enveloped me as I drank the fresh glory of her lips! I must come back to my love—I must! And by all that is good in nature and life, *I will!*

With a gentle sigh Carcita released herself, and we sat together on the couch, hand in hand—in silence—too gratefully happy for words.

It was then that the curtains parted—and into the room stalked René Hume.

His first glance was at the structure on which I had been lying—and I fancied I saw triumph in his eye and a slight smile come to his lips. Then his eye swept the room and came upon us.

The man’s whole frame stiffened as his glance flickered from Carcita to me. The bitter passion that arose to his face was an awful thing to see.

I was keenly sorry for the man. It would, indeed, be hard to lose so glorious a girl, so womanly a woman, as she who sat by my side. I felt with him in that moment—

and for him. I felt the black, gaping emptiness that must be in his soul as he looked upon the woman he had loved for years, who had refused him; a man of her world and her own kind for another—an utter stranger from another world, and one who had known that woman for but a few short hours. I felt that René Hume would not forget me. I felt that despite the power of the Council of Leaders, which I knew Elder could invoke, he would yet attempt either to kill me, or do away with me in some other dark way of which this cycle might know. I decided to be on my guard—and eyed the man sharply as he stood, body stiffened, hands clenched, countenance convulsed with a passion, the possibility of which, in this world, this cycle, among this people, I could not understand.

Carcita's arm silently stole about me, and through it I could feel the rapid pulsing of her heart—even as one may the palpitant throbbing of a frightened bird.

For fully a minute Hume and I thus faced each other—in bitter silence on his part, in quiet waiting on mine.

Then suddenly Carcita arose and advanced a step toward the man.

"René," she said softly, "you need not hate Gordon Bliss. Even had he not come, I should, though a thousand centuries pass over us, have still refused to be your wife. Is there then any reason why you should not step up and take his hand in yours and promise to be his friend—even as am I still your friend?"

Hume's mouth opened. He moistened his lips. A grayness came into his face, and blanched it until every feature stood out ivory-white; the shadows blackened. He spoke—jerkily.

"From the day you became twenty I have loved you," he gritted. "And from that day to this you have called me brother—and spurned my real affections as you would foulness itself. And yet I hoped—had reason to hope because you took from all the rest no other man. And then—to-day—hours ago, not decades of years—comes he—he—that—man—from another cycle—inferior, degraded, ignorant, unclean, burdened with the thought, the superstition, the crime, of a people five hundred thou-

sand years back of us in body and in spirit. And you—you say I should have no cause—to hate *him*?"

His arm stretched out and his tense finger pointed accusingly at my very heart.

"René," persisted Carcita, taking my hand, for I had arisen as Hume spoke—"René, for the sake of the friendship I have always borne you, and ever shall, take Gordon Bliss's hand in yours. It is my will."

For a moment I thought the poor chap would relent—would break down.

Then his face tightened again. He gritted out a single, terrible oath. Then with sudden excess of passion, leaped upon the structure Elder had bade him build, and with a terrible wrench collapsed it upon the floor. Carcita ran screaming to the door.

Hume turned upon me crying, "Had that been done as you slept and the time for your passing been at hand, you would never take that woman as your wife—and, by the power of the council, I would gladly give my life had it been so ordered."

And he brushed roughly past Carcita, and out.

Carcita screamed again for her father. Then she ran quickly back to me, and seized me in her arms.

"You feel all right?" she cried anxiously. "You are—well? You do not feel the time of passing upon you—you—"

I soothed her as best I might.

"Thank God—thank God!" she cried. "That wicked, wicked man. Here—sit down, Gordon Bliss. And fear not—my father will have another made—at once—at once—rest quietly, my dearest, and do not fear!"

"But fear what, Carcita?" I questioned. "All to-day, ever since I came, you have been telling me not to fear. What should I fear? I am not afraid of Hume."

She clasped her hands together.

"Oh," she cried, "I would rather let father tell you—it is too awful, too horrible—but do not fear. You will be cared for. And father—there's his step. He'll tell you all. I—I must go now—"

"But Carcita—all day long you have—"

She turned even as Elder broke through the curtains.

"All day!" she exclaimed. "Gordon Bliss, *two* days passed while you slept upon the platform. Two days—"

"Yes," interrupted Elder's deep voice, "two days. And without rest or sleep Carcita watched over you that naught of evil might occur."

Carcita flushed and left the room. Elder waited until she was well beyond hearing distance. Then he spoke.

"We thought that you were going. My first thought was of the formula. You heard? You remember it?"

I repeated the words of the formula he gave me, that formula so strangely combined the drugs of the laboratory and the powers of the human mind. He nodded and counted off the directions on his fingers as I spoke.

"Time pressed," he then went on. "I had to place you in safety before you might begin to change. Hence I did not swear you to eternal secrecy. Do you swear now by all you hold highest that no word or hint of this *open sesame* from your cycle to this shall ever be communicated by you to any living soul?"

I bowed my head gravely.

"I do," I said quietly.

"It is well," he continued. "Henceforth are you and our people as one. And in time to come, when you are once more back among your own people, use the formula well when the time comes for you to come again to us. But remember, Gordon Bliss, you can only come by this voluntary means when your earthly tasks are complete and your house in order, and those near and dear to you in what happiness you can give. For to break down the wall, to enter our vibration with safe certainty, the mind must be clear of all things negative, all down-pulling thought, all remorse, all regret. For the formula must act as powerfully on your mind as does it upon your physical body—and the mind must be clear—and *positive*."

I nodded.

"I think I understand," I said.

Then after a short pause:

"Carcita has often told me not to fear—that all will be well—that when the time of my passing comes I will be cared for

and will come to no harm. I ask her what I have to fear, and she evades the question as though it hurt her to even hint the answer, the danger. Can you not tell me, sir, just why this is—and what? Has it ought to do with René Hume?"

Elder sighed.

"With René Hume, you say? I can but answer, yes—and no. There is a danger—and we must guard to ward it off—and that danger has of itself naught to do with Hume. And yet, given certain circumstances even as the erection of that slight platform on which you have slept for two days and two nights while we watched, and the treacherous weakness of the thing—and Hume and that danger are as one. What that danger is I will tell you later. But as to Hume himself, I will say that after to-morrow noon you need have no more fear."

CHAPTER XIV.

TO LABOR, TO LEARN—TO LIVE.

I STARTED—in pity for my rival.

"The council has not—"

Elder put up his hand.

"The Leaders did nothing—nor will they so much as give the man a thought if he be careful. Hume goes—by no man's order—but by the simple order of the custom and law of our people. He goes to the Places of Production."

I stared. What was this new evolution of this new civilization?

"The Places of Production!" I repeated.

"Where those articles and foods needed by our people are grown or manufactured—yes," was the answer.

"But René Hume! You say he goes—he seems a man of leisure, of wealth. You said he was a student. Yet you now say he goes to these Places of—"

Again Elder nodded. Then smiled.

"Of course you cannot know. Yet it is simple to understand, Gordon Bliss. Hume goes—albeit he is a man of leisure and refinement and comfortable circumstances. But we all are men of leisure, and refinement and comfortable circumstances. It is the law. And Hume goes, as indeed do we

all go, because it is the custom, the rule, the law—and also our own individual choice as well—”

“Your choice!” I exclaimed. “To go to these places, to labor, to—”

“To labor—and to learn,” nodded Elder. “Know this, Gordon Bliss, that when man may live as he wills to live, and as long; when of life he may have as much as he does wish—there comes a time when life will pall. There comes a time when something other than the mere enjoyment of living by simply tasting of the easy and happy and cleaner things of life becomes a burden. Then comes a time when the mind reaches a state of droning lethargy—and, to stave off the will to die, man must turn to a newer vision, a newer life.

“Know, too, that when man can live as he wills to live, and as long—when this power is in every man, woman, and child upon this sphere, and every man, woman, and child knows that that power is within him—then there can be no such thing as class, then can there be no such thing as a division of the people into those who *must* work, and those who *may* play. When man can live, to all practical purposes, *forever*—even as we here may do—in the simple evolution of things all men do become equal in the eyes of all men.

“Thus do we have two factors working to send René Hume to the Places of Production. First the custom that has come to be law that out of each century man *must* do a certain number of years of productive work—more he may do—but for one-fifth of his time he *must*. And second—the man’s own will. In this case we have an exception—René does not at this juncture want to go and leave Carcita here with you. Yet he must, for his time has come and he has put it off long enough. And he knows he must go—and he will go—for on certain matters thus vitally affecting all our people either a man must follow the great laws that have evolved out of our vast years, or the Council of Leaders does as it sees fit.

“René Hume will go to the Places of Production. He will go to-morrow—at noon. He has but a few hours left—and during those we will carefully watch that he may

do no harm. Well, indeed, it is that he destroyed the framework by whose weakness he had expected to destroy you when the time came for your passing to your people! And, woe to René Hume should he, even yet, accomplish the foul desire which I read even from the beginning, even as he hoped to conceal it from me, deep-rooted in his very soul. We have powers of vision, Gordon Bliss, which even you cannot understand—powers that come only by living long, and studying much—and by being at the apex, and the end, of a vast pyramid of thinking generations. Thus did I, and Carcita not, know of your precipitate love. Thus did I, almost before Carcita did herself, know that she loved you. Thus, too, did I read, while he suspected it not, that René Hume was suddenly obsessed with jealousy and hatred.”

He fell silent—again pacing the room.

I mused over his story. René would do me harm. The platform on which I had been placed—surely its collapse a scant five feet to the floor could not hurt me seriously. Wherein lay the great danger? And why, indeed, must I, when about to pass, be raised in mid-air even as the ancients raised their dead? What was there to fear?

When a people can live on and on—labor means action, and action means real life, and real life that happiness and satisfaction of which Elder spoke. And then, too, Elder had said they go there “to labor—and to learn.” Dimly I began to see the profound learning each individual here must possess—the profound learning—the vast knowledge of all things of this earth.

“Then”—I spoke my thought aloud—“then a man such as you, who has lived for centuries beyond our own times keenest imagination, has learned many crafts and many arts?”

“Many,” nodded Elder, “and yet no man has yet learned all.”

“Are there any that try?” I questioned. Elder nodded again.

“The pursuit of knowledge is our life,” he said. “And there are many—indeed, the vast majority of us—who choose to dwell beyond the hills, and labor and learn and create. And they”—here Elder sighed

deeply—"they are, I believe—oh, I know it—the happiest of us all—the happiest."

I looked up at him. His face was grave—and a look of longing in his eyes.

"Sir," I said in quiet sympathy, "are you not happy here?"

He looked down at me with eyes full of compassion.

"You do not know all, Gordon Bliss—you do not, you cannot. And of many things, too, I cannot, I may not, tell you. Some day, if you—*when* you—come back—" I didn't like the sudden conjecture I sensed in that sudden change from 'if' to 'when.' He ran on: "Then in time even you may learn all. But for some of us men and women of the council there is a great burden. Aye, it is self-imposed—and glorious. But wearisome, ah, how wearisome. Think, Gordon Bliss, on our shoulders is all humanity. True, perhaps diminished now to less than half of what it was—what it *is*—in your cycle; and yet truly a great burden. The burden of a dying people—a passing cycle of humanity—and the end yet far away—centuries, scores of centuries in the dim future. And through it all we, the council, have willed to live, and now *must* live—on, and on, and on—to the very end of all things—to be the last, the final stand of a vast—"

A cold thought chilled me. Great Heavens! Did Elder mean that—I blurted out my thought.

"The last living men—on earth?" I cried.

Elder's eyes were filled yet with the mist of weariness.

"Even so—of our cycle, the last."

Again I was seized with coldness. The spreading loneliness of a world barren of humanity passed before my mind's eye. I saw spreading plains, broad valleys, sunny hillsides—green, golden, fertile, life-giving—and not a single human soul. I beheld the surface of the seas even as one may look upon a globe, and on it not a single sign of man. I viewed these same green plains outside the window at my side, and the glistening white villas scattered over them—and saw that these would be but the empty shells that silently murmured, "We are the ghosts of a dead people, a dead world, and

all about us—everything that lives and grows and has been touched by man—these things are but ghosts, too. All the rest—all humanity, every man, every woman, every child, every babe—is gone—dead—passed on. And we—the shells—the ghosts—remain!"

"Even so—the last," breathed Elder again. "And toward the end—even as your cycle speedily will grow, so will ours speedily diminish. For as our end approaches, each man fears to be the last left before the council. The will to live falls beneath the growing power of the will to die. And in those last few years—ah, how it pains me to think of it!—our people will madly rush to go. And then we, Gordon Bliss, we—the council—will be left alone. Alone—face to face with emptiness. Alone—with all life back of us, all power behind, and naught but nothingness ahead. Alone—and facing—what? Facing—ah, Gordon Bliss, we have learned much that I can never tell of things beyond the borderline that separates man from—other things. And in that land of twilight knowledge have we glimpsed—glimpsed. And when we make that last stand—*alone*, as each of us have felt we are by some unknown power constrained to do—then what, ah, what is it we shall face?"

"The burden of all humanity—on us who are its highest issue—on us who are the last! What shall we face?"

Elder paused, and his leveled finger held my eye again.

"Think not, man," he cried in deep-welled tones; "think not that we fear to die! Think not we fear to face whatever there be to face—and after all there may be naught at all. We do not know. We only feel this—and as if by instinct, act. No—there is no fear—and the happiness of a promise of rebirth in the cycle that is yours, Gordon Bliss, even though in that new life we will know naught of this—is with us all the time.

"No—not fear. But simply weight—the burden of humanity. And we the last, the highest—the pinnacle—the end. Were it not that I see it as my duty—I would not live another year; I would settle my life, and pass."

He turned again to me—suddenly calm. Then, with a smile, he said:

"For two days you lay upon the elevated couch that René made—asleep. We waited for the change—I prayed that if it came your passage might be safely made; and that, be it safely made, you might remember the formula by which you may subject yourself to our vibration and come back. But you did not change—and Carcita's joy and mine grew greater as the hours passed, and still you slept. For that sleep will mend the wear of the illness that sent you here—and when you go back, if I mistake not, you will go back well and balanced—if naught else"—Elder's eye shifted to the broken structure which still lay crumpled over the spot on which I had been found—"if naught else prevent. Thus three days have you been here—and the time of passing is due. At any moment—"

I interrupted with a hungry glance outside.

"Will you not show me some of the strange things of your cycle, then?" I cried. "Or"—I smiled awkwardly and turned my eyes from his—"or could not Carcita take me in hand, and—"

Elder's head shook gravely, but with decision.

"For your life, Gordon Bliss, attempt not to leave this room!" he cried harshly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE THREAT OF PLACE.

I STARTED. Was I—prisoner? Were these people afraid that I— Then came reason. Here I was safe. Outside, and who could tell what manner of deviltry poor Hume might try.

"You think René—" I began.

"No!"

The answer was fairly shouted.

"No!" exploded Elder again. "It is another thing—far worse. Promise me, Gordon Bliss, that you will never attempt, until I give you permission, to leave this room. On your life—and for your life, boy, make me this promise! Remember your love for Carcita, your longing to see your old home once more, your aspiration to be of us in

this world—and for your life's sake, and Carcita's, promise me!"

As questioning thoughts flashed through my mind I felt again the power of Elder's eyes on mine. And again, too, I sensed the pleading quality of his demand—felt again the same earnest request. Yet Elder did not speak.

I looked up. I met his eye firmly. "I promise," I said.

His smile was good to see.

"Then there is only need to care for what might happen here—there is naught else to fear. I will go at once and build another frame to hold your couch—that I should have done before. And remember this," he added as he parted the curtains at the door, "if you should feel the change come on you, hasten as you would to save Carcita's life; drag this couch over the rectangle chalked on the floor—place whatever objects you can find beneath its supports, raising it as high from the floor as possible. Be exact—be hasty! Then lie upon it at once—and compose body and thought for the change to come. And be alert, friend Gordon Bliss, son of mine to be, be alert—for sometimes the thing is lightning fast."

He nodded and left. And shortly Carcita entered with food.

Must I go?

Ah, yes, I must. For Elder himself had said it—and he, a leader, knew.

Even as the thought struck me I felt Carcita's heart flutter wildly and a slight shiver run through her frame.

I looked down into her eyes again, and found them full of tears.

"Dear girl," I cried, "are we not both happy—happy—"

Her arms crept up about my neck.

"Gordon Bliss—has not my father told—"

"Carcita," I cried as she hesitated, "what should he tell—why do you fear?"

Her slender body trembled.

"Did he not say—did he not have you promise not to leave this room? Did—"

Her eyes held mine. I nodded dumbly.

"Then," she went on, "do you not understand why it is so needful? Do you not understand, you, a professor of physics at

that great university of which you tell, why it is that René thought to destroy you by the collapse of his frail stand at your first move? Do you not understand why, when the change comes, you must—oh, *must*, for your life and my happiness, Gordon Bliss—be lying on that tall stand? Can't you see, Gordon Bliss?"

Her arms tightened. I held her close—the dearest thing in heaven or earth—the woman I loved as I doubt man had ever loved before.

"I do not understand," I said.

She started—eyes on mine.

"Must I—must I—tell you?" she whispered a bit hoarsely.

I shook my head.

"If it pains you to do so, my dear—then don't."

"Oh, but it should be told— My father, because he disliked to frighten you, did not— He is so good, my father. But he was going to tell before the last—so if I—if I—tell—"

My curiosity was quickly awake now.

After all, why should I not know the danger that threatened me? I was the person most vitally concerned; it was my body that was in danger—my life. I should know.

And Carcita—if it did not pain her to tell—

I nodded to her to go on.

"It is simple," she whispered; "like most things that are horrible, it is simple, Gordon Bliss. You are here, you see us and not the life of your cycle, because ours is in a different vibration—is that not right?"

"It is, dear," I answered.

"But, nevertheless, though you cannot see them, the buildings and trees and people of your own, are right here about us?"

I nodded my head faintly, not yet understanding.

"And your own home, your house—almost exactly where ours is—built on the same ground, occupying the same space? Oh, can't you see, Gordon Bliss—the awful danger that confronts you should—"

In a flash the whole terrible thing came upon me. I clapped my hand over Carcita's mouth.

"Hold, dear!" I cried. "I understand—I understand."

For a moment all was black about me—and my head swam with the sudden terror of it all. Carcita's head sank to my breast and her sobs fairly shook me. As well as I might I comforted her; yet all the time that new horror grew upon me—for at last I understood the thing I had to fear. At last I understood why it was that Elder had asked how far it seemed that I had fallen when first I became conscious after the change that brought me here. At last I understood why it was that Elder had so carefully questioned as to the direction in which I lay, the distance from the wall—and then had René mark the floor with that mysterious white rectangle.

At last I understood why Elder had ordered the platform constructed, and why during that long sleep which had given my body the complete rest every cell of it needed, I had been stretched out upon it even as I had been stretched out on my bed, which did indeed occupy the same identical position in space.

At last, I say, I understood in what danger of utter and instantaneous destruction I was; how a single slip during the time the change was upon me might mean death—not only death, but immediate dissolution. And I saw, too, how René had thought to destroy me by the collapse of the platform—and be safe himself—for might it not be accident?

Well has it been said that two objects cannot occupy the same space—there you have the crux of the whole diabolical situation.

Aye, indeed, here on our old earth's surface are many solid objects occupying the same space—but they are in different cycles, different vibrations, the one unseen to the other, and to it non-existent. I, as I sat by Carcita, holding her close in my anguish and our love, might in her cycle be occupying space which in my own cycle was filled up by the solid concrete walls of my house.

Now, should the change occur as I sat thus, and I passed from this vibration into that of my own home cycle—occupying the same space as part of a wall of solid con-

crete—what would happen when finally I returned? Ah, you see! You see, even as did I! Yet you cannot, as you understand the terrific explosion which in the second that I came back would occur as my body and that concrete came together with the violence of two colliding spheres, feel the same horrible tumultuous fear clammily crawl upon you and tear at your very heart as I did.

Two bodies cannot occupy the same space. And when they attempt to, the one within the other endeavoring to displace cell for cell the concrete substance of the other, both are doomed. What would happen to me were the change to take place so quickly that I could not get to a place of safety before I came to myself in my own cycle?

No wonder that Elder had figured exactly where lay that bed of mine in the room of my home, that was so close yet so vastly far away. No wonder he had asked how far I had seemed to fall, when in changing to solid substance of this cycle I had fallen those few feet from the suddenly vanished bed of my own to this as suddenly appearing floor. No wonder, in order to avert possible error, he had the framework constructed so as to raise me even higher than my bed probably was, rather than risk the chance of error and allow my coming to myself in my own cycle within the solid substance of the bed or the floor itself—and hence to utter destruction.

No wonder, too, that Elder dare not let me wander outside—for that position slightly above the chalked rectangle was *the only absolutely certain place* where it was definitely known that there was space in my cycle for me safely to “come back,” and not break into a wall or a piece of furniture or even a tree, or some other thing of substance which would send me to destruction as my groping body sought to enter the same space.

I trembled, and the girl in my arms sensed my growing apprehension. Carcita looked up, and her arms sought my neck again.

I looked down upon her and rubbed my eyes, for it seemed that a sudden dimness

had come over them. I rubbed again—and there was no change.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RETURN.

THEN I noticed dimly a look of growing horror in Carcita's eye. Her mouth opened, as if to speak, her body stiffened. Then her head turned, and her glance flashed toward the rectangle on the floor—then back to me. And her clutch upon me tightened convulsively; then with a frightened cry—half sob, half shriek—she tore herself away and ran, screaming, to the curtained doorway for her father, crying:

“The platform—the platform! Father! Father—the platform!”

With a rush of blackness as heart-staggering as in that ghastly nightmare of my youth I realized that the change was upon me, and I was about to leave the cycle that held Carcita and return to my own.

My first thought was of my coming back. Would Elder's formula really work, or had he told it to me but to give me comfort and fill my heart with hope without which I must surely die?

My second thought filled me with horror. The platform—Elder had not finished it yet. This, indeed, was the end.

I cried out to Carcita—but she was gone—her voice afar.

I attempted to move the couch on which I sat, and place it where that rectangle was on the floor, even as Elder had advised. But my strength seemed suddenly drained from me, even as when Courtenay had restrained me in my bed—I could not shift the thing an inch.

In despair I rushed to the rectangle and lay down upon the floor—in the vain hope that were my bed some five feet above it, then I might come to myself in the cycle that was my own—just below the ceiling of the room beneath my own bedchamber. Coming to substance there, I reasoned in that flash, I might have a nine-foot fall to the floor below, but at least I would not be blown into a million microscopic atoms

by breaking into some solid portion of my house.

The same sensations I had experienced when I lay upon my bed three days before came to me. The room grew dimmer. The walls assumed a half transparency even as the great humming seized my every bodily cell.

I felt that the world and all it contained were coming to an end, rushing into the utter nothingness of space. Then faintly I heard voices, afar. Then closer—and yet fainter. And then I felt myself lifted high—and so held.

Then there was a sudden commotion—and even as I was held arms closed about me, and a shadowy Carcita was at my side, and her lips on mine with a touch that was fairylike, and a promise and high hope that flooded me with glory.

Then, again, came a complete and grateful relaxation—then the delicious and almost ecstatic vibration of my whole body and my very soul—then as everything about rushed into nothingness came peace, oblivion.

I was passing—I was somewhere—God knows where—between the cycle that held my love and my new life, and that which held my sister and my old.

Consciousness came.

Even as I had experienced the sensation of simply “being” when first I had passed into that strange cycle in which dwelt that ancient and dying yet immortal race which to all intents and purpose was my own, so did I experience now.

When consciousness first condensed into thought—would I be—was I—safe? I had been lying on the floor, within that simple rectangle of chalk. I had felt myself being lifted, yes—as though Elder and others had rushed to my aid and by their bodily strength held me at the height they had arranged until the change had completed itself.

Yet perhaps that feeling had been fantasy—the dream of my mind as it hoped that such might be. And even as I thought—at any second I might go into a nothingness from which there would be no return to life, my own cycle, or that of Carcita.

Then, even as I feared, I realized that space was closing in upon me. Shadows entered my vision—then blotches of light and darkness. Then movement—then distant sound. Then dimly I felt that I was in the midst of familiar life and surrounded by familiar things.

Then, with a rush, I was in my room. I closed my eyes. I felt again a slight dropping sensation and a feeling of softness.

A cool breath passed over me—a shriek of mingled fright and joy pierced my ears—I was seized and held tight.

I opened my eyes—and found I was in my sister’s arms. I was indeed safe!

CHAPTER XVII.

BELIEF.

THERE is really nothing more to tell.

True, I might go on and write down the dazed joy of Charlotte—my sister, who, even against Dr. Courtenay’s advice and plea, had remained by my empty bed, convinced that I would return; hoping against hope, fighting against fear, praying to all that might give aid, during all those three days of my terrible and unexplainable absence.

I might go on and tell how Courtenay—half convinced by Charlotte’s faith, and obsessed too with scientific curiosity, and in his affection for me hoping too—had comforted the girl, and finally confessed a love for her which I have since seen happily consummated in wedlock.

I might recount their horrified astonishment when at the nurse’s frightened cry Charlotte and Dr. Courtenay, and Dr. Holcomb, and Dr. Greaves, and Professor Morley of the university, and Jones from the laboratories—had gathered about my bed—and before their own unbelieving eyes, seen me disappear—dissolve, as it were, in thin air—*dissolve!*

Seven persons—five of them professional men whose positions in the community and in learning were those of eminence and fame and reliability—and two women, one a Swedish nurse and the other my dear sister—had seen that change. All could

hardly believe their eyes. None had ever experienced the like before—nor dreamed it, nor imagined even its possibility.

Yet they had seen—*had seen*.

And I *had experienced*.

I might tell how Charlotte, on the day before I came, had seen for a space of several minutes my dimly outlined form floating, it seemed, a foot or more above my bed. Her joy at seeing me—her distress as slowly again I went into the nothingness beyond her reach and ken! Oh, how her arms ached to seize me—and how terrible had been her struggle to keep from doing so, lest it do me harm!

Then finally I might repeat the manner of my return, condensing, crystallizing, precipitating out of nothing. Charlotte's breathless suspense as my substance became firmer—lying gently above my bed, yet strangely doubled (as indeed I must have been, being probably held up by the arms of men invisible forever to the dear girl, yet seen, nay, surely aided, by my beloved Carcita), then her inexpressible joy when finally my body dropped down upon the bed and she knew in her heart and soul that I was with her world and with her once again.

Then the pleasure that was in Courtenay's eyes—and the curiosity, eager for my word.

Then the interest, the exclamations, the bewildered astonishment of the little group when I told them where, and what, I had been. The half belief when I first mentioned another existence within our own, an infinite number of such cycles living unseen, unencumbered, on the surface of our earth. Then, as the scientific possibility of the thing forced itself upon their ever open minds, their growing faith in my story. Then, having actually seen me go, having

felt of the space on my bed wherein I should have been and found it empty, having seen my half return of the day before, my full return on this—they were, even against natural doubt, absolutely convinced.

And since then I have made my preparations. My business affairs are settled. My professional duties are cared for—for Professor Morley has taken up my study in the physics of crystallization, and will aid my sister in the publication of the book treating upon it.

Charlotte is happy with Dr. Courtenay—and to those two alone have I confided my determination to try Elder's formula and return—and they, preferring themselves to stay in this life together rather than chance that to which I hope to—nay, *will*—return, have agreed that I make the attempt.

Particularly does Charlotte, in her new happiness, urge me to go back to Carcita and the ever enduring love that shall be hers and mine. And so I will do—and may that fate which watches over us, whate'er its name may be, be kind. I must go—I *will* go. And after all, the *will* to go, with Elder's inspired confidence to lead me on, and his formula stirring every atom of my body and my soul—surely I need not fear failure. I will, I shall, go; for I believe. To-night, on the same bed—for my return must be safely made and sure—I will compose myself, and with my conscience clear, and the formula pulsing through my veins and mind, and my sister and Courtenay watching over me, I will make the attempt. And then—Carcita—and the strange things that I shall see—and a life of learning and of love!

Ah—what a promise for all mankind!

Who could ask for more?

(The end.)



Next week's Complete Novelette will be

“THE NECKLACE OF HEAVEN”

BY S. GORDON GURWIT

an engrossing tale of adventure in North Africa.



An Accident

by *Lyon Mearson*

THE old sourdough sucked at his pipe and spat accurately and methodically at a spittoon ten feet away.

"Nowadays," he remarked, "this here thing they call life is kinder complex. You kinnot always tell from the outside just what the contents is. Take a bottle. The label says something about three stars, combined with the word whisky, or coon-yak, or gin, or some sich foolishness. Fer all you know, yer li'ble ter git blind from imbibin' same."

"That doesn't seem to stop you—" I began tentatively, and paused in a hopeful fashion.

"Well, no. I've seen everything, anyways," he contended. He looked at his pipe with an injured air, and spat again, accurate as always. "Don't it beat all hell how juicy a pipe gits after you smoke it ten or fifteen years—"

"You might try one of my cigars," I put in hastily, offering him my case.

"Er—well, all right," he assented, reaching for the case as though it were a sudden good idea; just as though it was not what he had been hinting at. He lighted the cigar and inhaled for a moment or two gratefully. I was silent, and my silence bore fruit.

"As I was sayin' when you interrupted me," he went on, "you kinnot always tell from the looks of a thing how it's goin' to act when actin' becomes frequent and nec-

essary. Take a four-year-old baby, f'r instance, you wouldn't never think—"

Skull Gulch was a tough mining camp in them days, an' don't let nobody tell you different. You don't hear anything about Skull Gulch now, fer the simple reason that there ain't no Skull Gulch. It vanished when the claims give out—but it was a live place whilst it lasted.

There was the Golden Eagle saloon an' dance hall, an' half a dozen shanties, besides a general store, an' there was "Death" Winters. The reason he was called Death was because that's what he was. He was sudden, sure death, swift as a rattler, only he didn't give no warnin'. In a sorta parenthessiez, I wish to remark that the rattler is a gentleman; but I ain't givin' no lexshure on nature study.

There was a rough gang at Skull Gulch—not no worse than there was at a hundred other minin' camps, only these here other camps didn't have no Death Winters. Death was a two-gun man; his two guns hung low on his hips, an' they came out like lightnin' when necessary, which same Death thunk necessary very often. He had only one answer to any kind of an insult, whether it really was an insult or whether he only considered it one. I've seen four or five men kick out their lives on the floor of the Golden Eagle because Death considered he was insulted.

You see, there wasn't no law there in the present sense of the word; the only law was a gun, an' each man was his own policeman. It wasn't considered nobody else's business; though once or twice I did see men who was foolish enough to think that one of Death's killings was their business. I will say this for Death—he soit'nly give them a nice burial, headstone an' all.

I never yet seed any one so quick on the draw as this here Death Winters; looked like's if he needed only one motion to git his gun an' to shoot. His hand would drop like chain lightnin', an' the same instant ye'd hear the shot. He never missed, either. Death was a pale, small man with a disposition like a snake, an' long, lean, nervous fingers which was just made for triggers—an' cards. Most of his killin's came about on accounta cards. He was concentrated pizen an' sure death.

Ye'd think that even Skull Gulch wouldn't 've stood fer him, but it did. I don't think anybody else could 've got away with that stuff, but Death was a sort of a necessary evil. He owned the Golden Eagle, an' his booze was the real stuff—none of this rotgut that they peddled in other camps. He made it a point to get the finest distilled. Of course, he charged three or four prices fer it—but Lawd, it was worth it! He also ran the card game, an' in addition half of the men in town had been helped finanshully by him at one time or another; though they hated him an' his ways, yet they felt sorta under obligashins to him.

An', of course, a lot who passed through the camp was floaters, transients, who come in and went out—unless they ran foul o' Death. Then they just—stayed. Most of them brung it on themselves, because Death wore two guns, which meant he was a fighter; it was a sign that they'd better keep off the grass or else draw quick, because a two gun man don't take no foolin' from nobody. Some of them could draw quick, too, but Death could draw quicker'n quick. I don't suppose the difference in time was ever more'n an eighth or a quarter of a second—but it was the difference between life an' the long sleep.

I never saw nobody who was more cold

blooded about a killin', neither. He wouldn't even draw a long breath; it was just another job done, to him, an' that was all. He didn't kill because he wanted to kill; only because it was his nature, like a rattlesnake. As I said before, he was a human rattlesnake, without the rattle.

The first time I ever seen him was the first time I blew into Skull Gulch. Naturally, the first thing I did in Skull Gulch was to saunter into the Golden Eagle. There was a kind of a noise goin' on; I see a pale little feller with cold blue eyes, small eyes they was, a thin beak of a nose an' lips that looked like a straight line, they was so thin an' cruel; he was standin' at the side of the room givin' a good, sound beatin' to a woman.

First he would cuff her on one side of 'er face, an' then on the other. She was pale, too, 'ceptin' where his hands had brought the red to her cheeks, but she was game. She never let a whimper outa her; just stood there where he was holdin' her an' looked straight at him, sorta quiet. I found out later it was one of the girls he'd brought out to the Golden Eagle with him. There was half a dozen of 'em.

I looked around to the rest of the men there, to see how they was takin' this, because I never interfere in a stranger's game until I know where I'm at. They was takin' it pretty quiet, most of 'em lettin' on they never seen it at all—all except one feller, Sam Wellers, his name was. He looks at Death, quiet an' pale, too, an' his breath seems to come sorta quick through his lips.

I could see the veins throbbin' in his temples. Suddenly the girl can't stand it no more, an' keels over, dead to the world, a clean faint. This is too much for Sam Wellers.

"You dirty hound!" he hollers an' draws his gun.

The next minit Sam Wellers's sobbin' his life away on the sawdust floor with a bullet in his lung.

'Course, it was in self-defense, same as all Death's killin's was, but it wasn't no square game, because when it came to the draw nobody had a chanst with him. I never could understand why nobody didn't shoot

Death in the back some time, an' t' hell with ethics; maybe it was because he was so contemptshewus of 'em all. I will say this for the man, he had nerve of steel. He would shoot sorta unconcerned; as though it didn't make no difference whether he hit anything or not—but he always did hit the mark. Except once.

Once I heard Bill Mercereau call him a liar; I was present at the funeral, too. 'Nother time Ken Connors thought he'd caught him skinnin' at cards; quite likely, too, with them long, sensitive fingers o' his'n. Poor Ken never touched another card after that. He hit the long trail im-mejit.

So it went; I never come acrost no killer what had such a long string of killin's to his credit; nor did I never come acrost one who killed so casual-like. You'd never see his hand reachin' fer the gun, it went so quick; there'd be a motion like the head of a rattler shootin' forward, an' the same second there'd be a shot—an' he would be throwin' out the used cartridge, puttin' another in its place, an' stickin' the gun back in his holster as though it was another bad job he had just got through.

It was after he plugged Ken Connors for disagreein' with him concernin' the number of aces in a ordinary deck of cards that George Cooper came to Skull Gulch. George was a inoffensive elderly man, about fifty-five or so, with a heavy beard, a innocent, mild blue eye, an' a little grandson about four years old which he called Sonny.

George Cooper took a little shanty at one end of the camp, staked out a claim for hisself on the river, an' went to work mindin' his own business.

The first night he hit camp he come into the Golden Eagle an' saunters up to the bar. Death Winters is sitting at the table at the side of the room, dealin' the cards—there was five of us in the game. He looks up at the stranger, an' for one instant I thought I seen his hand tremble. He looks again, an' evidently it's all right, 'cause he goes right on with dealin', payin' no more attention to the new man.

I wondered what it was Death thought he'd been seein', but nobody else seemed to notice it, an' we went right on playin'.

A coupla days after I makes friends with George Cooper, an' I mentions to him that Death musta thought he knew him that first minit he stepped into the Golden Eagle.

"Maybe he does. I don't know." George shrugs his shoulders, but says nothin' more about it.

"He's a killer," I offers. "I wanta warn you, friendlylike, not to start nothin' with him."

George shrugs his shoulder again. "I won't start nothin'," he says. "Sometimes I finishes, though," an' he won't say nothin' more.

The kid, Sonny, becomes a pet around the camp, bein' he's the only child there. The men teaches him to swear somethin' accurate an' terrific, an' he plays aroun' on their claims, afraid of no one an' friends with every one, bein' they treat him so nice.

I never see nothin' between George Cooper an' Death, 'ceptin' that wunst or twict it seems to me that Death looks him over kinda curious when George isn't watchin'. It looked to me like he was tryin' to remember somethin'; he mighta been tryin' to remember where he'd seen this man before. Each time he gives it up, though.

Death seems to take a likin' to the kid, though—that is, much as he could like anybody. He'd pat him on the head when he'd go by, an' sometimes I seen him stop an' try to talk to the child, but he wan't much good at talkin' baby talk, an' he made a bad job of it. Nice lookin' kid, too; hair like flax, an' the bluest eyes you ever seen; like two little pieces of the sky. He used to run around camp dressed up in little tiny overalls, an' the girls in the Golden Eagle was crazy about him, though George used to grab the kid out whenever he found him there.

"Plenty o' time for that when he grows up, I'm thinkin'," he used to say, an' there was something hard in his innocent blue eyes when he said it; something there I couldn't hardly make out. It was his daughter's child, he told me. She was dead, but that's all he would ever say, an' I got the idea there was a lot more he wasn't sayin'.

Well, we never pressed no man about his personal affairs in Skull Gulch, bein' it was dangerous. Long's a man minded his own

business, we let him do it an' didn't bother him, an' George Cooper certainly didn't mingle much with the gang. He'd come in for a drink now and then, hardly talking to any one, and he'd go out again in a few minutes; that was all. Only wunst I caught him lookin' at Death sorta queer. It was only for about the quiver of an eyelash, but even in that time I could see it wasn't the ordinary way you look at a man. There seemed to me a whole lot behind that look. It did appear to me that George's innocent blue eyes wasn't nohow as innocent as they was painted, but he never gave us cause to know no different.

One afternoon I was sittin' in a five-handed game in the Golden Eagle. Death wasn't playin'. He was standin' at the bar talkin' to the barkeep. There wasn't many of the boys in the room, most of them bein' out workin'.

I throws away a bum pair o' eights an' looks up, an' there's Sonny standin' in the middle of the room. His jaw is swollen like he had mumps; he's chewin' steady an' elegant at the biggest wad o' chewin' gum I ever seen a kid try to negoshiate. He looks aroun' the room for a minit, an' sees nobody's payin' no attention to him, an' then he makes out Death standin' there at the bar.

Death's guns hang pretty low, an' one of them must've attracted the kid, 'cause he goes over an' lays holda it, tryin' to pull it outa the holster. Death jumps, an' his hand shoots for the gun like a streak o' light, but he smiles when he sees who it is.

"Oh, it's you, you little runt," he says.

"Want pretty," says the kid.

"How do you say it?" asks Death, takin' out the big shiny thing an' holdin' it up in the air.

"Please—pretty," pleads the kid, an' Death smiles that cold smile o' hisn an' hands him the gun.

"Thanks—nice mans," the kid smiles up at him, an' goes off into the corner to play with his new toy. He fools around with it dangerous close, an' I gets sorta hot an' cold all over.

"He'll hurt hisself with that gun, Death," I remarks, sorta risin' as though I intended to take it away from him.

"Aw, sit down," growls Death. "He can't pull that trigger."

I sits down, because Death has another gun, you know, an' it ain't no ways safe to disagree with him. Besides, I thinks, Death is right; it took strength to pull the trigger of a weapon like that in them days.

Then the dealer deals me three aces, an' I forget all about the kid fer a few minits. The play goes fast an' excitin', an' I draws another ace, an' begin to have hopes of quittin' ahead of the game after all. In the meantime Death is talkin' to the barkeep, fergettin' all about the kid.

It's five minits before I glances up again an' sees the kid in the corner, still playin' with the shiny gun. Death seems to wake up to it, too, an' he walks over to take the thing away. He appears to be mad over somethin'—probably somethin' the barkeep told him.

But the kid likes the gun, an' ain't givin' up so easy.

"No! Pretty!" says Sonny, holdin' on to his prize with both chubby little hands. "No, no!"

"Aw, let go, you brat!" growls Death, losin' his temper, grabbin' the gun an' suddenly givin' the kid a vicious kick that sends him all the way under the table.

At that moment George Cooper is standin' in the door, lookin' for his child. He sees the kick, an' in a flash goes white down to the roots of his whiskers.

"You low cur!" he hollers, an' makes a reach fer his gun.

But of course he ain't got no chance. Death has his gun in his hand—the gun he had just grabbed from the kid.

He shoots instantly. Then somethin' funny happens. I sees him standin' there, only the butt of his gun in his hand, spinnin' aroun' kinda slow. There's a foolish smile on his face, an' all of a sudden he goes down on the floor, dead before he landed.

It seems his gun exploded in his hand, an' a piece of it blew off nearly half of his head. It's a wonder to me that none of the rest of us got hit.

Sorta mechanical, I picks up a piece of the gun which had blown near me, against the wall. It's most of the barrel, with the

muzzle. I looks it over peculiarlike, an' then I sees what makes Death's gun blow up.

Most of the barrel was stuffed up solid with chewin' gum!

"Just a meaningless accident," I said when the old sourdough paused to relight his cigar. "You don't mean to say the child purposely stuffed up—"

"No, not purposely," replied the old sourdough. "But as to the thing bein' a accident—well, mebbe it was an' mebbe it wasn't. There's some things which looks like accidents to us which ain't so acci-

dental, mebbe, to them which makes things go roun' down in this here vale o' tears. Y'see, I found out later from George Cooper that Sonny was Death Winters's own son; there had been an affair with Cooper's daughter, an' then Death hit the grit an' beat it. Cooper's girl died. Cooper hisself came into Skull Gulch accidental, an' account his beard Death didn't recognize him, though he did think wunst or twicet that he had met him before."

"But the point of the story—"

"The point of the story," interrupted the old man, "might be that gum-chewin' is in very bad taste."

IN THE WOODS

GIVE me a stream where the gad-flies flit

And flirt by a drowsy pool!

Give me a glimpse of sky, sunlit,

And a bank moss-cushioned and cool!

Give me a rod and a reel and a line

And a hook—and a bit of luck—

And I'll capture, to crown this dream of mine,

A trout brimful of pluck.

Give me a place by a camp-fire's glow

On the cool, fresh, pine-sown floor!

Give me a song of the long ago

And a yarn from the hunter's store!

Give me the perfumed hush of the night

And a great, round, golden moon,

A woodland glade in that fairy light

And the rippling water's tune.

Give me the pal of my heart's desire,

A pal any day or place,

Whose love has been tried in friendship's fire

And found beyond time or space!

A pal who can cheer with a touch of his hand,

Thinks my jokes as good as his own;

Give me a pal who can understand

When I want to be left alone.

Florence B. Fink.



The Further Adventures of Zorro

Part II by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THROUGH the connivance of a jealous Governor who wishes to punish Zorro, a benevolent highwayman (who in reality is the caballero, Don Diego Vega, with the interests of the common people at heart) that had interfered with the crooked politics of Spanish California of more than a hundred years ago, Barbados, a pirate, is given permission to attack and sack the village of Reina de Los Angeles. This he may do with the assurance of no soldier interference, for the garrison under Captain Ramón, has been ordered away for the night. The loot is to be the pirate's, but Captain Ramón asks as his share that Lolita Pulido, fiancée of Zorro, be abducted and carried aboard the pirate boat. In looting the village, a sacred goblet is stolen from the church, whose priest, Fray Felipe, takes an oath that he will not reënter the edifice until he obtains the cup. Don Diego Vega (Zorro) is giving his friends a bachelor dinner when the pirates break in upon them, and in the fight that follows, slashes his mark—a "Z"—on Barbados's forehead. The pirates escape, using the only horses in town; Fray Felipe asks Zorro for aid in his quest; and at that moment a servant from the outlying home of Lolita Pulido brings word of the abduction. Alone, riding the only horse left in the village, Zorro makes a dash for the coast just in time to swim after a pirate boat; he manages to touch the hand of Lolita as she dejectedly cowers in the stern, assures her of his presence, and whilst the outlaws store their booty, Zorro hides himself aboard their ship.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GOBLET.

SENORITA LOLITA PULIDO, after a time, was conducted by Barbados to a tiny cabin below decks. It was no more than eight feet square, and had a bunk along one side of it. Certainly, it was no place for a delicately-reared lady of gentle blood.

It was far from being clean, in the first instance. Vermin that meant nothing to pirates caused the *señorita* to shudder and almost scream. Even as she entered, two

huge rats scampered through a hole in the cabin floor, rushed down into the bowels of the ship.

"'Tis no palace," Barbados admitted. "I'll leave the torch so you may have light until the day dawns, which will not be long. The torch will keep the rats away. The smoke will drift through that open porthole. You will be safe here. There are no weapons, and even such a small and dainty tender human being as yourself cannot squeeze through that porthole and drop into the open sea!"

The *señorita* had no reply for him. She

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tilted her chin again, tried to hum a little song, and glanced around the tiny place. Barbados grew surly.

"Too good to speak to me, are you, proud one?" he sneered. "You may have another tune to chant before many days, after you have met the man for whom you were stolen. Is there anything you want or need?"

The *señorita's* face flushed, but she faced him bravely. "I want your absence—and deeply feel the need of it!" she replied.

"By my naked blade! Were it not that you are to be handed over to another, I'd take it upon myself to tame you!" Barbados declared. "Ha! Deliver me from proud wenches with their noses in the air!"

He fastened the smoking torch to a wall, went out and slammed the door behind him, and Señorita Lolita heard a heavy bar being dropped into place. For a moment she stood in the middle of the cabin, her hands clutching spasmodically at her breast, and then she went over to the bunk, inspected it, and finally crawled upon it and sat cross-legged, staring at the opposite wall.

The ship was old, the floor worn and full of holes, and the walls had cracks in them. From one side came a stench, as though supplies had been stored in the space adjoining, and had spoiled. Through the porthole she could see the black night.

The horror of her situation was heavily upon her now. She seemed to fully realize her predicament for the first time. She remembered again how she had seen her father cut down, and her home in flames. She wondered how it fared with her parents, and she wondered, too, what was to be in the future.

The only ray of hope was that Don Diego was near, that Señor Zorro had promised to give her aid, and that his sword would protect her. And yet how could he—one man against scores of scoundrels? Don Diego, even as Señor Zorro, was only human, after all. Yet she hoped that, at the climax, he would reveal himself. He was a *caballero*, and he would know what to do in an emergency. Better that Señor Zorro drive his blade through her heart than for her to live stained!

She heard a tumult on the deck, a great noise, the sounds of clanking chains, and knew from the feel of the ship that she was under sail. Above her head feet pattered on the deck. The great voice of Barbados and the echoing one of Sanchez came to her as from a long distance. The rushing wind pulled the smoke of the torch through the open porthole.

The *señorita* sighed and leaned her head against the wall of the cabin. Tears trickled from her eyes and started coursing down her cheeks, but she wiped them away swiftly. None of these pirates should see her cry! Never would they be able to say that one of the blood of the Pulidos had shown fear!

She closed her eyes for an instant, as though that would shut out the horror of her thoughts, but found that it did not. It seemed to her that she heard a faint hiss, but she supposed that it was the wind or the water.

She opened her eyes again—and almost shrieked in alarm. Four inches in front of her face the point of a sword had slipped through a tiny crack in the wall, coming from the space adjoining!

The *señorita* recoiled a space, but watched the blade as though fascinated by it. Inch by inch it slipped through the wall, until two-thirds of its length was inside the cabin. And again she restrained a cry, but this time a cry of joy. On the blade, marked with some black substance, was a big Z!

So Señor Zorro even now was near! He was on the other side of the partition, only a couple of feet from her! She bent her head forward as the blade was slowly withdrawn, put her lips close to the tiny crack in the wall.

"Diego!" she whispered.

"Not Diego, but Señor Zorro, *señorita*, at your service," came back a low tone.

"Thank the saints!" she breathed. "But, what can you do? You must be careful!"

"Think you I would allow them to carry you away, and not follow?" he asked.

"If they find you—"

"Do you put such small value, *señorita*, upon my ability to care for myself?"

"Diego! Zorro!" she whispered. "To you I am not backward in confessing it—I am so afraid!"

"Then will I sing for you, beloved!"

"Zorro! Dare not to do it! They may hear!"

"Let them hear a decent song for once in their wicked lives!" Señor Zorro said. "Be of strong heart, *señorita*! And be not frightened at what you may hear or see. It is in my mind to terrorize these vermin who call themselves men, preparatory to rescuing you!"

"Brave words, Diego!" she said. "But you cannot fight against four score. If, at the end, you could do me one service—"

"And that?" he asked.

"Death is to be preferred to dishonor, Diego!"

"Why speak of dying? Do you forget that you are my affianced bride? You are to live, and I am to live, *señorita*, and have many happy years. Think always on that, and not on the other! And be of good cheer, for I am near you always!"

She heard a slight movement on the other side of the partition. He did not speak again, nor did she. Her heart was beating like angry waves against a rocky shore. Her face was flushed. It gave her courage just to know that he was near. Señor Zorro, she felt confident, would find a way.

There was silence for a moment, and then she heard the soft hiss again.

"*Si?*" she questioned.

"This is some sort of a storeroom," he said, "in which Zorro has made a temporary nest. But I do not intend to remain in it forever. It is in my mind to look at you through the porthole before the dawn comes."

"Diego! To dare such a thing—"

"What would not a *caballero* dare for love?" he asked. "For love of such a one—"

"Diego!"

"Call me Zorro, for, by the saints, that is my rôle now! I find that I have a dual personality, and the tamer part of me is not working at present. I am Zorro, the daring in love and war!"

"Have a care, for my sake," she begged.

"I have work to do and a game to play, and they may be combined," he answered. "For the moment, *Adios!*"

Again she heard the little sound, as though he were retreating from the partition and crawling over boxes and bales. There was deep silence for a time, save for the noises on the deck. And then she heard his voice, raised in song, and her heart almost stopped, for she knew that the pirates must hear it, too.

She leaned her head against the wall, that she might hear the better, though she was sorely afraid. She had heard the song often before, from Don Diego's lips, and when other young *caballeros* had come to her father's *hacienda* serenading. But never had she heard the real Señor Zorro sing it before, and never before had it sounded so thrilling and so sweet.

"*Atención!* A *caballero's* near!"

To guard the one to his heart most dear!

To love, to fight, to jest, to drink!

To live the life and never shrink!

His blade is bright, his honor, too!

Atención!"

The voice grew louder, more ringing. It seemed to the *señorita* to swell through the ship and across the tossing sea. Her heart beat faster, though she still feared for him. Well she knew the audacity, the reckless courage of her Señor Zorro!

"Zorro!" she breathed. "Man of men! *Caballero* mine!"

There was silence on the deck above, and then she heard the harsh, loud voice of Barbados, but could not understand his words. Señor Zorro was continuing his song:

"*Atención!* I've a thrust in store—

For rogues, for foes, an abundance more

To shield my lady from all harm,

To save her from the world's alarm;

A *caballero* calls to you—

Atención!"

The *señorita's* eyes closed, her lips parted slightly, her breathing became as the stirring of a leaf in a gentle breeze. The song had lulled her fears.

"Zorro!" she whispered, as the verse was ended. But there came no answer from the other side of the partition.

Up on the deck, however, there was con-

sternation. Barbados, having listened, whirled angrily toward his crew.

"Who dares sing such a song?" he shrieked. "Are there not royally good pirate ditties, that some of you must use the mush-like tunes and words of the high-born?"

"Every man is on deck," wailed Sanchez, who had been superintending the storing of the loot. "'Tis a ghost song!" he exclaimed.

"A ghost song!" shrieked some of those nearest him.

Barbados shuddered. "There will be ghosts aplenty if this nonsense does not stop!" he declared, whipping his cutlass out of his belt. "It was no ghost singing. A ghost would have a more perfect voice. If I hear it again—"

He heard it again. It seemed to come from the sails above, from the waves overhead, from the cabins below.

"*Dios!*" Barbados swore. "By my naked blade—"

"It is a ghost song!" Sanchez whimpered again.

Barbados whirled upon him, but the lieutenant dodged the blow that would have hurled him senseless to the deck. The pirate chief, breathing heavily, looked around at his men. Terror already had claimed some of them.

"It is a trick of some scurvy knave I'll split in twain!" he declared. "On with your work!"

The men shivered, but again bent to their tasks. Barbados walked to the rail and stood looking down at the dark water, and then toward the land, where the dawn was almost due. Through the darkness and up to him slipped one of the pirate crew.

"Master!" he whispered.

"To your work, hound of hell!"

"A word with you, master!"

"Concerning what?" Barbados demanded.

The man edged closer. "Master, I have a present for you—a goodly piece of loot that is not in the common store."

"How is this?" Barbados said. "You steal from your comrades?"

"Softly, master, else they hear!" the man

whispered. "This is something special, and I got it for you."

"In Reina de Los Angeles?"

"Sí, master! In Reina de Los Angeles. It was while we were in the church there."

"In the church?" Barbados gasped.

"When the old *fray* first stood us off, master, and before you came. We had rushed forward, and I was in the van. And when the old *fray* was hurled backward the first time, I got it."

"And what is it?"

"A golden goblet, master, studded with precious gems. See—I have it here! I saved it for you, master, and thought perhaps that you might give me promotion—"

Barbados looked at the goblet, struck by the light from the nearest torch. It glowed and glistened like some live thing. The pirate chief recoiled.

"Away with it!" he cried. "I do not want to touch it—do not wish to see it! It is a thing of ill-omen, the thing that old *fray* was trying to protect!"

"But, master—"

"Ill-luck will follow the man who has it. It is some sort of holy thing! Away with it! Keep it for yourself. Gamble it away, and the sooner you get rid of it the better. You may be struck down for taking it. I had a friend once who robbed a church and struck a priest, and I do not care to remember what happened to him! Are you going to take it away?"

The man gasped, astonished, and put the golden goblet beneath his shirt.

"I may have it all for myself?" he asked.

"Sí! I would not touch the thing! I call upon the saints to witness that I never touched it!"

So, through all the ages, have wicked men, in moments of fear, called upon the gods they have pretended to scorn.

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE AND MYSTERY.

SEÑOR ZORRO, having concluded his song, crept over boxes and bales to the little door of the storeroom. There he crouched and listened for a time, but heard nothing save the noise from the ship's deck

and the wash of the sea and singing of the wind through the rigging.

Presently he opened the door a crack and peered out into a pitch-dark, narrow passage. He slipped through and closed the door after him. Again he stopped to listen, and then he crept forward, reached a ramshackle ladder, and went up it swiftly and silently to a tiny hatch.

Lifting the hatch he crawled out upon the deck near the rail, hidden from the glare of all the torches. He had seen such a ship as this before, and knew her build well. There were no mysteries for him.

Along the rail he went like a shadow, and as silently. He reached a point where he could look amidships. Barbados was back among his men, now, urging them to greater speed, and Sanchez was echoing his commands. The ship was sailing at a fair rate of speed before a freshening breeze.

Señor Zorro crouched in the darkness and contemplated the pirate crew for a moment. He put out a hand to brace himself against the rolling of the vessel, and it came in contact with a tub of small bolts. Señor Zorro had an inspiration.

Far ahead of him, in the flare of a torch, he saw the ship's bell. Señor Zorro grasped one of the little bolts, stood to his feet, took careful aim, and hurled the bolt from the darkness. He missed the bell by the fraction of a foot, and the bolt flew overboard.

Señor Zorro grunted, got another bolt, and tried again. It struck the bell squarely, glanced away, and fell into the sea. Out above the din rang one clear note. The ship had an excellent bell.

Instantly there was silence. Barbados whirled to look forward. His crew stood open-mouthed.

"The ship's bell sounded!" Sanchez wailed.

"And which of you struck it?" Barbados demanded.

"No man was near it," Sanchez declared. "But it sounded. I do not like this business!"

Barbados shivered, but made a show of courage. "Something struck it," he said. "Possibly something dropped from aloft. Are you babies that you flinch because of

the ringing of a bell? To your work, else I wade among you, naked blade in hand! Ha! I have sailed with a throng of children, it appears!"

They bent to their work again, and at that moment Señor Zorro hurled another bolt, and the bell rang out clearly once more. Again the work stopped as though Barbados had bawled an order for the men to cease.

"A ghost bell!" a man shrieked.

"A ghost bell!" Sanchez declared, crossing himself. "We are doomed! The ship is doomed!"

"To your work!" Barbados was both afraid and angry now. He strode forward, threatening them. He made his way toward the bell, and stood looking at it. Because of his presence the bell did not ring again. Yet Barbados did not feel at all easy. He beckoned the man who had the goblet.

"You retain the thing?" he asked.

"Sí, señor!"

"It is an evil thing for you to hold."

"You want it?"

"Not I, by the saints!" Barbados swore. "And do you keep away from me while the thing is in your possession. If misfortune comes to the ship or the company because of the goblet, then will you go overside first of all! And with a weight around your neck!"

The man scurried away along the deck, and Barbados, his courage returning, whirled around and issued a volley of commands. From the darkness Señor Zorro hurled another small bolt, and for the third time the bell sent forth its ringing message.

Barbados whirled around again, his face suddenly white. He was within six paces of the bell, and he knew that no other man was nearer it than that. He felt the eyes of the terror-stricken crew upon him, and knew that he must show courage now, else lose his control over his men.

"Some one is playing a trick," Barbados said. "And when I find the hound of hell who is doing it, I feed him to the sharks in two sections!"

He called two of the men, bade them get torches, and stationed them near the bell with orders to watch it closely. They

shivered, but they obeyed. Thoughts of a ghost were terrible enough, but Barbados was there in the flesh, and his cutlass was ready in his hand.

But the bell did not ring again. Señor Zorro had accomplished his purpose, which was to make the crew nervous, and he was through playing in that direction. He slipped on along the rail, now and then peering over. After a time he picked up a line, fastened it to the rail and tossed the other end overboard, tried it with the weight of his body, made a loop in it, and slipped one leg through the loop.

Over the rail and down the side he went, slowly and carefully, the sword of Zorro in its scabbard at his side. And presently he came to a porthole, through which light streamed. He swung around, grasped the edge of it.

The Señorita Lolita, looking up suddenly, almost shrieked in sudden alarm. But the next instant she was off the bunk and across the tiny cabin, and her face was within a foot of his.

"Zorro!" she said. "You are doing a reckless thing—"

"Would I allow a few score mere pirates to keep us apart?" he asked. "Am I that sort of *caballero*?"

"But you are in grave danger, from the men above and the sea beneath!"

"Danger is the spice of life, *señorita*! After we are wedded it will be time enough for me to be tame."

"But that may never be, Diego."

"Zorro, *señorita*, if it is all the same to you. I must remember continually now that I am Zorro."

"You must get back to the deck and go into hiding," she said. "I fear for you. And should anything happen to you what would become of me?"

"It is some small risk," Señor Zorro admitted, "but I felt that I should make this call."

One of her hands was at the porthole's edge. Señor Zorro, clinging to the rope, grasped it in his right hand and carried it to his lips.

"The most beautiful *señorita* in all the world!" he said.

"Zorro!"

"And for once I have you, *señorita*, when your *duenna* is not present to pester us. We are betrothed. We were to have been wed to-day. I will have more courage, *señorita*, if I have felt your lips against mine. The memory of our betrothal kiss still tingles in my veins, but it is a memory that should be refreshed."

"Señor—"

"How is this?"

"Diego! Zorro, I mean!"

"That is much better."

"And then you will climb above and take heed for yourself?"

"With a kiss for incentive, I could climb to the summit of the world and reach for heaven!" Señor Zorro declared.

She blushed and then inclined her head. He bent forward, and their lips met in the porthole.

"Go!" she said then. "Go, Zorro, and may the saints guard you!"

"My arm is strengthened," he declared. "And your wishes are to be obeyed. *Señorita, adios!*"

An instant their eyes met, and then he was gone, climbing up the line hand over hand through the darkness. Señorita Lolita tried to watch him, but could not. And so she hurried back to the bunk and curled up on it again, holding one hand to her flaming cheek, moistening with her tongue the lips that the lips of Señor Zorro had pressed.

Zorro reached the deck and disconnected the line, wishing to leave no trace behind him. He glanced toward the land, and realized that soon the dawn would come. Along the rail he slipped, until he came to a spot from where he could watch the pirates.

The majority of the loot had been stored away. No man was aloft. Barbados was cursing at a group near the opposite rail. Señor Zorro looked across at him and wished that he was near. He saw Sanchez, too, knew him for the lieutenant, and it came into his mind that Sanchez had commanded the squad that had abducted the *señorita*.

And, as he watched, Sanchez started across the deck, around the mast, bore down upon Señor Zorro where he stood in

the darkness. Soon he would be in the darkness near the rail. But before he could reach it he would be forced to pass beneath one of the flaring torches, and for an instant the strong light would be in his eyes. Señor Zorro whipped out his blade and crept forward to the edge of the blackness, keeping behind a mass of cordage piled upon the deck.

His eyes were narrowed now, his lips in a straight line, an expression of determination in his face. So he stood and watched Sanchez approach, holding the sword of Zorro ready.

The moment came. The blade darted forward and struck, and its point worked like lightning. Sanchez gave a scream of mingled surprise and pain and fear, and reeled backward, clapping a hand to his forehead.

Barbados whirled to look. Señor Zorro, as silently as a shadow, darted along the rail through the black night, on his way to the little hatch and the storeroom below.

"Fiends of hell!" Barbados was shrieking. "Sanchez, what is it? You screech like a shocked wench!"

Sanchez, still shrieking, staggered back and turned beneath the flaring torch to face them. On his forehead was a freshly cut letter Z.

"The mark of Zorro!" Barbados gasped. "So—"

"A demon struck me!" Sanchez cried. "I saw no man! Something came out of the night and struck me!"

"Fool!" Barbados shrieked. "A blade made those cuts."

"But there was no blade, no man! Out of the dark it came—"

"Think you Señor Zorro is aboard?"

"No man, I say!" Sanchez shrieked. "It was a ghost. There is a ghost aboard. We are doomed—the ship is doomed! The ship's bell rings—and men are cut—"

"By my naked blade!" Barbados swore. "A sword in the hand of a human made that cut! Do I not bear one myself?"

"But how could this Señor Zorro get aboard?" Sanchez wailed. "It was a ghost!"

The ship's bell gave forth one more melodious clang! Señor Zorro, on his way to

the storeroom and his hiding place, had stopped long enough to hurl another bolt.

CHAPTER X.

A DEAD PIRATE.

SANCHEZ and some of the others shrieked in terror. Barbados, cursing loudly, strode to the middle of the deck, whirled around, brandished his cutlass as though he would have fought the world. He would not admit to himself that this thing was getting on his nerves, but he glanced anxiously toward the land and wished for the dawn. He drove the men to finish their work, grasped Sanchez roughly by the arm, and led him aside.

"Understand," he said, "either this Señor Zorro is aboard in some mysterious fashion, or else there is a traitor among us playing this Zorro's part."

"A ghost—" Sanchez began.

"Another word of ghosts, and I run you through!" Barbados warned. "The men are silly fools, but you are supposed to have some sense, being second in command. When the day comes we search the ship; and if we find this Señor Zorro in hiding we deal with him in a way he will not relish. He is one man against many!"

Sanchez shivered and raised a trembling hand to his flaming forehead. The blood had streamed down his cheeks from the wound Señor Zorro had put there; and Señor Zorro, on his way to his hiding place, had paused for an instant to watch this comedy—had paused, and so was lost to caution.

Back along the rail he hurried and from the tub he took some of the bolts. Up into the rigging he went like a monkey, until he was over the deck. He braced himself, took careful aim, and once more the bell rang out.

The pirates whirled toward it, and Barbados took a step forward, an oath rumbling from his lips, while Sanchez screeched and tried to hide behind the mast. Señor Zorro hurled another bolt, and this one struck Sanchez on his shoulder. He cried out again and fled across the deck.

Another bolt hurtled through the night,

and this time Barbados felt the blow on the back of his neck. The screeches of Sanchez drowned the noise of the bolt falling to the deck. The pirate chief whirled upon the men nearest.

"Some one is playing tricks!" he shrieked. "If I find the man doing it—"

The bell rang again. It was too much for the pirates. They rushed toward the rail and stood there, white of face and shivering, clutching at their breasts, looking out into the black night as though they expected some demon to come riding toward them on a breath of breeze.

Señor Zorro went down the rigging swiftly, for the first streak of dawn was showing over the land and stealing across the sea. Along the rail he rushed, reached the little hatch, and let himself down. A few minutes later he was safe among his boxes and bales in the storeroom.

He crept across to the tiny crack through which he had whispered to the *señorita*; but he could not see her where she was sitting on the bunk—could see only straight ahead.

"*Señorita!*" he whispered.

"Zorro!"

"Safe again, *señorita*. I have been playing with these babies of pirates."

"Be not rash, else I call you Don Diego," she said.

"How can I be Señor Zorro, and not rash?" he wanted to know. "The dawn is coming. Have you rested?"

"I could not sleep," she replied. "There were thoughts of you, and of other things."

"But now I guard," he whispered. "Sleep, and I will watch."

She started to make reply, but instead she hissed a warning. Heavy steps had sounded outside the cabin door. She heard the bar being removed. And then the door was opened and one of the pirates stood in it, grinning, a torch in his hand.

"I have brought food," he said, "at the chief's command."

Señorita Lolita's lips curled in scorn as she looked at him.

"Do you think I would eat it?" she asked.

"It is the chief's command. You are to be kept well fed and pretty as the prize of some great man."

"You may take your food away again!"

"And have the chief slit my throat for not carrying out his orders?" the man asked. "Do you take me for a fool?"

He stepped into the little cabin and closed the door behind him. And then she saw that he carried a bottle of wine and half a cold fowl. She gasped as she looked at the wine, for there was a label upon the bottle, and it bore the stamp of her father's *hacienda*.

It returned to her with a rush—memory of her father being struck down, of her home in flames, of her weeping mother crouched over her father's body. She gave a little cry and reeled back against the wall.

"Leave me!" she commanded. "Out!"

The man leered and stepped toward her. She darted away from him, horror in her eyes. He put the bottle and fowl down upon the bunk.

"I leave the food and drink, pretty wench," he said. "You may use it or throw it through the porthole into the sea—it is all the same to me."

"Out!" she cried again.

"You do not like me?" he asked, getting closer to her. "Many women have. You are not to be spoiled being the prize of some great man, but a kiss will not spoil you. Never have I kissed a wench with proud blood in her veins. It will be something to remember and boast about!"

Now she crouched against the wall, her heart pounding at her ribs, her breath coming in little gasps. Her eyes were dilated with terror.

"Out!" she said, though her fear reduced her screech to a mere whisper. "Your master shall know of this!"

That sobered him for a moment, but the picture of her pretty self was before him, tantalizing him, tormenting him. He reached out a hand to clutch her. She could retreat no further. She put up her tiny hands as though to beat him back.

"What is a kiss?" he asked, laughing. "I would not harm you—only a kiss!"

"I would rather die!" she gasped.

"For that I shall take two—a dozen! Proud wench, are you? Ha!"

He grasped her wrist and started pulling her toward him. She lurched backward,

fought with what strength she could, felt that she was about to swoon, and realized that she must not. He followed her, reached out the other hand to grasp her better.

And like the darting of a snake's tongue came the sword of Zorro through the crack in the wall. In and out it darted with the swiftness of thought. The *señorita*, reeling back against the wall, felt herself released, saw the pirate sag before her, to his knees, topple forward, and collapse at her feet.

Terror-stricken, she looked down at him, her eyes bulging wide. Blood flowed from his breast and formed a pool on the floor of the cabin. A hiss from the other side of the partition brought her to her senses. She realized, then, that Zorro's blade had done this thing to save her an indignity.

"*Señorita!*"

"*Si?*" she questioned.

"Take the fellow's dagger from his girdle! Dip it in the blood on the floor! Have courage and act quickly! 'Twill appear as though you did it when he offered you insult!"

She realized what he meant, and was quick to obey. She needed the blood of the Pulidos to aid her now. Stooping, she reached out a hand and grasped the hilt of the dagger in the dead man's belt. She drew it out, shuddered, turned her head away for a moment, faint at the sight of the blood.

"Courage!" Zorro's whisper reached her ears. "And make haste, *señorita!* Some man may come!"

Now came the thing that tested her courage. But she felt that the eyes of Señor Zorro were upon her. Again she bent forward, and she bathed the blade of the dagger in the pool of blood upon the floor. Then she sprang to her feet, holding the dagger in her hand, her face white.

"Open the door," Zorro whispered from beyond the partition, "and shriek!"

She hurried to the door, shuddering as she pulled her skirts away from the dead man. She opened it, and peered out. And the shriek that she gave was no acting, but the sudden outpouring of what she felt.

There was a moment of silence, and she shrieked yet again. And down from the

deck tumbled Barbados, rage in his face. He looked at her and at the dagger in her hand. He thrust her aside and stepped into the cabin.

"So!" he said. "What has happened here?"

"A lady of my blood does not suffer insult!" she said.

"Ha! The dog forgot his instructions, did he? 'Tis well that he is done for! You have saved me a task!" Barbados declared. He turned and looked full at her. "A wench of spirit!" he said. "I have half a mind to keep you for my own!"

Back to the door he went, and shouted to those above. Two men came rushing down. Barbados yelled commands at them, and they carried the dead man away. Another brought water in a pail, and dashed it over the floor to wash the blood down the cracks.

Barbados turned and looked at her again. "You may keep the beast's dagger for a souvenir," he said. "Let me clean it for you."

She surrendered it willingly. Barbados wiped the blade on his trousers, bowed, and handed it back to her.

"Take it!" he urged. "Use it when you will, if there are others who try to disobey my commands. You are to be delivered, unspoiled, to a certain man. Failing that, I claim you for myself. And put out the torch when I have gone. The day is here!"

He went out and closed the door, and once more the heavy bar was dropped into place. *Señorita Lolita* tossed the dagger from her, hurried to the bunk, and collapsed upon it. Her senses seemed to be reeling. She forgot to extinguish the torch.

"*Señorita!*" Zorro whispered from beyond the partition.

But she made him no reply. The terrors of the night had taken their toll. She had swooned at the dawning of the day.

CHAPTER XI.

ZORRO WALKS THE PLANK.

THERE was no dawn in the dark, evil-odored storeroom, but Señor Zorro, by peering through the crack and into the little cabin, could tell of the ap-

proach of the day. The interior grew gray, and then brighter, and finally a ray of sun penetrated and touched the dingy hole with glory.

Señor Zorro put his lips close to the tiny opening and whispered his call:

"*Señorita!*"

Her swoon had changed to a deep, unnatural slumber by now, and she came from the midst of it at his sibilant call, bewildered for a moment.

"*Si?*" she asked.

"You were silent for a time, and I was afraid."

"Señor Zorro afraid?" she mocked.

"Afraid and not ashamed of it, where you are concerned, *señorita*," he replied. "Curl up and try to get some natural sleep. It is in my mind that these pirates will be busy beating out to sea or trying to reach their land den, and will have no time to bother you."

"And what do you intend doing?" she asked. "Do you intend to sleep also?"

"Don Diego Vega might feel called upon to sleep now and then," he answered, "but Señor Zorro dare not. Worry not your pretty head about me, *señorita*! Rest your pretty eyes, and by the time you awake fate perhaps will have been kind and revealed to us a way out of this present difficulty."

She heard him scrambling among his boxes and bales and barrels. She would have spoken to him again, but did not dare raise her voice above a whisper, and she felt slumber claiming her. She was thoroughly exhausted. Before she went to sleep, however, she extinguished the torch, and stood for a moment before the open porthole, looking through the morning haze at the distant land.

The ship was riding easily on the long swells, sailing swiftly toward the south. The *señorita* slept, and in the dark storeroom Señor Zorro reclined on a pile of sacks and tried to think things out. In an emergency he was quick to think and to act, to take advantage of every opening, but to sit still and analyze a situation was beyond him. He was a man of action, and it was action he craved.

He did not doubt that Don Audre Ruiz and the others had obtained possession of

the trading schooner and would follow. But would they follow the correct lane of the sea? And, if they caught up with the pirates, what would follow? The *caballeros* would be greatly outnumbered. Not that such a thing would cause them to hesitate about an attack, but it would work against them, of course.

For an hour or more Señor Zorro thought on the problem, itching to be in action and knowing that he should remain quiet. The pirates would be searching the ship, he supposed, since he had marked Sanchez the way he had. He would have to remain in hiding, bury himself in the storeroom in such manner that they could not find him.

Then, after a time, he heard a noise in the little cabin, and quickly made his way to the crack in the wall. He could see that the door had been opened, and then he saw that Sanchez was standing just inside it.

"*Señorita!*" the pirate lieutenant called. "Sleep not when the chief commands!"

Señorita Lolita came from her slumber and sat up on the bunk with a little cry.

"Do not be afraid," Sanchez told her. "By my naked blade, I will keep my distance! I have no wish for a knife between my ribs, driven there by a high-born damsel who thinks nothing of murder!"

"What is your wish?" she demanded. She was herself again now, scorning him, her chin tilted.

"It is no wish of mine," Sanchez protested. "I but carry the commands of the chief. He orders that you come on deck, and at once."

"I prefer to remain here, Señor Pirate," she replied.

"No doubt. But the commands of Barbados are made to be obeyed, as I learned some years ago. He has said that you are to go on deck, and so you shall, even if I have to carry you."

One step he took toward her, but she sprang from the bunk and crouched against the wall.

"Dare not to touch me, foul beast!" she cried. "'Twas you cut my father down! 'Twas you stole me away from my home and fetched me to the coast!"

"I do not want to touch you, little spit-fire!" Sanchez informed her. "I have but

come to escort you to the deck. What Barbados wants with you I do not know. Perhaps it is to have you get some fresh air, so you will look pretty when you are delivered to the great man. Ha! You are pretty enough now to suit any man who is not too exacting."

He turned back toward the door, offering her no affront. And there he waited, as though with deep respect.

"Are you coming?" he demanded. "Barbados is not the man to be kept waiting."

Once more she curled her lip in scorn, once more her chin was tilted, and she went forward, drawing aside her skirts, and swept past him like a queen leaving an audience chamber. Sanchez grinned and followed her.

Señor Zorro, through the tiny crack, had witnessed this scene. He did not believe that Barbados merely wanted her to take the air. He felt sudden fear for her, and once more his eyes narrowed and seemed to send forth flakes of steel. He scrambled over the boxes and bales toward the little door.

Up the rickety ladder he went and to the hatch, and there he listened for a time, hearing nothing alarming. And then he raised the hatch slowly, an inch at a time, blinking his eyes rapidly at the bright light of the day.

None of the pirates was in sight. Señor Zorro slipped out and dropped the hatch covering, whipped out his blade, and crept through the little passage toward the spot from where the deck of the ship could be viewed.

He was in time to see the *señorita* piloted across the deck to where Barbados was standing alone. The crew were forward, some sleeping sprawled on the deck, others leaning against the rail watching the antics of the flying fish.

Barbados whirled and stood with arms akimbo, regarding her narrowly. She faced him bravely, her hands clasped behind her back.

"*Señorita*," the pirate said, "queer things happened during the night. I would question you concerning them."

"Is it necessary?" she asked.

"By my naked blade, it is!" he roared. "I am not to be treated like a dog by you or any of your ilk. This is my ship, and here I am sole master, and it would be well for you to remember it."

"I am quite sure none other would desire the mastery of her," the *señorita* replied.

"You have a biting tongue," Barbados said. "I would hate to be your husband. Else that tongue were tamed by love, it would be a hot dish to have continually."

She turned away from him and gazed across the sea. He took a step nearer her.

"Is this Señor Zorro aboard?" he demanded suddenly.

"Would I know it, were he?" she countered.

"Possibly. I am asking a question, and desire an answer," Barbados said. "It has been said that a high-born wench such as yourself scorns to utter falsehood. Let us see if that is correct."

She made no reply, and the face of Barbados grew purple with wrath. He closed and unclosed his great hands as though he would have liked to strangle her.

"Is Señor Zorro aboard?" he demanded again.

"Have you seen him?" she wanted to know.

"I have not. But I have seen some things that I imagine are his doing."

"And I notice that you and your lieutenant bear his mark," she said.

"Ha! Let me but get my hands on him, and he'll bear more than a mark!" Barbados declared. "I am having a search made of the ship. If he is found you'll see how a man can be sent to his death speedily."

The *señorita* gave a little cry and recoiled, her hands at her breast.

"Ha! You show fear for him!" Barbados cried. "So he is aboard, is he?"

"Have I said so?" she asked.

"You have not—but now you are going to tell me the truth. Wench, I'm done with trifling. You presume too much on the knowledge that you are to be the prize of an important man. Do you not know you are in my power? Could I not do with you as I pleased, and then heave you overboard, and tell this important gentleman later that

you got the chance and threw yourself into the sea?"

Evil glistened suddenly in his eyes, and the little *señorita* recoiled again. Sanchez, who had remained standing near, laughed like a fiend.

"We could gamble for her," Sanchez suggested.

"This is my affair, and you will do well to remain silent," Barbados declared, whirling upon him.

Once more he faced *Señorita Lolita*, and the fiendish look upon his face made her flinch.

"Tell me all you know about this *Señor Zorro*!" Barbados commanded. "Did you slay the man in your cabin, or did this *Señor Zorro* do it? Answer me, wench! Reply here and now, else I teach you a lesson you will remember to your last hour."

He sprang forward suddenly and grasped her arm cruelly, and she cried out because of the indignity and the pain.

Señor Zorro, from his place of watching, flinched as though he had experienced the indignity and pain himself. He wanted to hurl himself forward and to the attack, but he realized that it would not last for long. He could not hope to engage the entire ship's company, though he made a long and running fight of it, and emerge from the combat the victor.

But there came an interruption. From forward was a hail:

"A sail! A sail!"

The pirates sprang to their feet. Those who had been sprawled upon the deck asleep awoke.

Barbados forgot the *señorita* for a moment and turned to look.

Behind, and bearing down upon them swiftly, came another ship. *Señor Zorro* knew, as did the pirates, that she had put out from the land before the dawn and far to the south of where the pirate ship had been at anchor.

Hope beat suddenly in *Zorro's* breast. She was a trading schooner, he could tell even at that distance. If only she carried *Audre Ruiz* and his friends! It was a question what would happen. If she was some honest vessel, perhaps she would fall

victim to the pirate craft. She might not be prepared to fight.

Barbados issued a volley of commands. The pirate craft turned for a run farther out to sea, so that she could tack back and catch the oncoming ship between her and the shore.

Lookouts were posted to watch carefully. Sanchez ran here and there, echoing the orders of his chief.

From his hiding place *Señor Zorro* watched now the approaching vessel, and now the deck where *Señorita Lolita* was standing against the mast, forgotten for the moment.

Were he quite sure that ship carried his friends *Señor Zorro* could go into action. For he flattered himself that he would be able to hold his own until the other ship came up.

It appeared that the other vessel had no intention of running up the coast. She changed her course also, and bore after the pirate craft.

Señor Zorro watched her carefully. He could not make out her flag. At the distance he could see nothing except that she was of the type of trading schooner, and that she had swift heels. For she was gaining rapidly, as though sailed by experts. And the pirate craft was foul of bottom, needing careening and scraping.

Barbados had hurried to the rail and was watching the oncoming ship. *Señorita Lolita* saw it also, but did not seem to realize that it meant hope. Perhaps she feared that the ship was but coming into grave danger, running into a conflict that would mean capture and death for her crew.

Señor Zorro glanced at the deck, and then back at the approaching vessel again. He saw that another sail was being sent aloft. It was broken out, snapped into place, the lines tautened. And *Señor Zorro* with difficulty restrained a cheer. On the white expanse of the sail, painted there in haphazard fashion, but easily made out, was a monster Z.

So his friends were on that ship! *Señor Zorro* felt better now. He glanced once more toward the deck, and realized that Barbados had seen what was on the sail

also. For the pirate chief left the rail and stamped back to the *señorita's* side, determination in his manner and rage in his countenance.

"Now you'll speak the truth, wench!" he shouted. "Is Señor Zorro aboard this ship? If those are his friends coming up, then will we attend to him before we attend to them!"

"I do not care to hold conversation with you," she said.

"No? By my naked blade, I am in command here!" he roared. "An answer I intend to have."

He lurched forward and grasped her by the shoulders, shook her as a terrier shakes a rat, held her at arm's length and shook her again. She fought against crying out, but could not win the battle against such cruel odds.

One plaintive little cry drifted across the deck and straight into the heart of Señor Zorro.

He transferred his sword from his right hand to his left. He whipped the dagger from his belt and hurled it. His aim was poor, yet he had come close enough. The dagger was driven, quivering, into the mast between Barbados and the *señorita*.

Barbados, with a cry, sprang backward, and the *señorita* slumped to the deck at the foot of the mast. And Señor Zorro realized in that instant that he had stepped forward too far and had been seen. Sanchez gave a cry and started toward him. The pirates whirled from the rail to look. Barbados saw him.

"'Tis Señor Zorro!" Barbados shrieked. "After him! Fetch him to me alive! An extra share of loot to the man who gets him!"

It was the promise of loot that drove them on. They shrieked and rushed forward. Señor Zorro put the blade of his sword between his teeth and darted up into the rigging.

And then began a fight the like of which the pirates never had seen before. Señor Zorro seemed scarcely human. Up the rigging he went like a monkey. He sprang from spar to spar. Down the ratlines he rushed, down the ropes he slid.

Now and then he clashed with one of

the pirates, and always the sword of Zorro darted in and out, and a wounded man was left behind.

"Seize him!" Barbados shrieked. "After him, dogs! Is one man to hold you off forever? Do not slay him! An extra share of loot—"

Señor Zorro struck the deck and darted across it. Sanchez retreated before his darting blade. He pierced the breast of a pirate who stepped before him, hurled another aside, sprang to the mast, and recovered his dagger. He stooped for an instant, and pressed the lips of the *señorita* to his own, and dashed on.

Now he was cornered, and now he fought his way to freedom. A dagger whirled past his head and buried itself in the deck beyond. Into the rigging he went again, up the ratlines, out along a spar.

They followed him, and he put his sword into its scabbard and sprang. Far below he caught another spar, ran to the mast, started downward again. One glance he gave at the approaching ship. His friends were gaining, but they still were far away.

Again they had him cornered, and again he escaped them by jumping to the deck below. He dashed around the deck cabin, met and defeated another man with a single clash of blades, and was at the rail.

There was grave danger on the deck, he knew, and so he went aloft once more. Up and up he went, while Barbados and Sanchez shrieked to the others to follow and get him.

"Alive! I want him alive!" Barbados screeched.

Another spring from spar to spar. Señor Zorro almost missed because of the rolling of the ship. But he caught and clung on, and scrambled to a place of safety. In toward the mast he hurried.

But there was a treacherous spot on the spar, where the mist had struck and clung, a wet spot made to cause a boot to slip. Señor Zorro felt himself reeling suddenly to one side. He grasped wildly—grasped nothing but empty air. His heart seemed to stop beating for an instant. He felt himself falling through space. To his ears came the terrified cry of the little *señorita*. The deck rushed up to meet him. He

struck it with a crash and the darkness came.

Señorita Lolita gave another little cry and covered her face with her hands. Barbados and Sanchez rushed forward, the others at their heels.

Señor Zorro was unconscious for the moment, though the fall had broken no bones.

"Bind him!" Barbados cried, glancing back at the oncoming ship. "We attend to him first, and then to his friends. Water his head well and bring him back to life. Get ready a plank!"

The pirates rushed to do his bidding.

Señor Zorro's wrists were lashed behind his back. One man hurled water into his face, and he groaned and opened his eyes, and tried to sit up on the deck.

"Ha!" Barbados cried. "So it is Señor Zorro, eh? And now we can repay you for this little mark you put on my forehead, *señor*! Barbados, also, knows how to make payment!"

He gave a signal, and the pirates forced Zorro to his feet. He tried to fight, but they overpowered him. They braced him against the mast, while the *señorita* crept aside and watched.

"Hold the wench!" Barbados commanded two of the men. "We don't want her throwing herself overboard. And I wish her to witness what is to come."

The two men held her. Señor Zorro, half throttled, was kept against the mast. Barbados made another sign, and some of the men carried forward a heavy bar of iron and lashed it to Señor Zorro's wrists.

"To the rail with him!" Barbados commanded.

They forced him to the rail, and the two men urged the *señorita* along beside him. Over the rail a long, wide plank had been extended.

Señor Zorro knew what they meant to do to him. And now Señorita Lolita realized it, too.

"No, no!" she shrieked. "You must not do this thing!"

"Ha! Revenge is sweet!" Barbados cried. "Señor Zorro, you are about to descend to a watery hell! We'll let you take your sword with you, since you may

need it fighting demons. You take the plunge, and then, when yon ship comes up, we attend to your friends! As for the *señorita*, know that she will be delivered safely to one who has bargained for her."

"Why not give me a chance in a fair fight?" Zorro asked. "Any two of you—any three—"

"Your friends are coming up, and we must prepare for them," Barbados replied, laughing. "You have fought your last fight on earth, *señor*. See if you can mark the brow of the devil with your cursed Z."

"Diego!" the *señorita* moaned.

"As a special favor you may kiss the wench," Barbados said. "It will be practice for her. And take with you to the bottom of the sea the knowledge that another will kiss her soon."

The *señorita* rushed forward and threw her arms around him and kissed him, unashamed.

"Diego! I'll follow you!" she said.

"'Tis a merry end," Señor Zorro declared. "Be brave of heart! Our friends are at hand, *señorita*! If Don Audre Ruiz is aboard that ship he will know how to save you—and how to avenge me."

Again they kissed, and then the two pirates jerked her roughly backward.

Barbados laughed like a fiend.

"Practice for the other man!" he roared.

"When Captain Ramón—"

"So it is Ramón?" Zorro cried.

"Sí! And a lot of good the knowledge will do you now."

"This much good—that I shall not die!" Zorro answered.

"If you do not, then indeed are you a man! With a weight on your lashed wrists— Enough!" he exclaimed. "Put him on the plank!"

They lifted him and stood him upon it, facing him toward the sea. They forced him a short distance from the rail.

"Diego!" the *señorita* cried, agony in her voice.

At her cry the plank was tipped.

And with her cry ringing in his ears Señor Zorro shot downward like a man of metal—shot downward into the tossing sea, and was gone!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Lady of the Lure

by Herbert J. Mangham



IT was because of her glorious chestnut hair, coupled with a rare, ingenuous beauty that knew nothing more sophisticated than borated talcum powder, that Lily was permitted to follow the casting director through the long corridor in the administration building to the strange world beyond.

All about her was "the lot," dotted with office buildings, dressing rooms, laboratories, warehouses and shops, all constructed to counterfeit different types of public buildings and homes, that the working companies might be saved needless outside trips for exterior shots. Beyond these were heterogeneous streets lined with architectural mockeries, mere façades with only the suggestion of a building behind them. In the center of the lot stood the great glass-inclosed structure housing the "stages," the technical name for the vast floor upon which the sets are erected for interior scenes.

The extra women's dressing room was behind the carpenter shop.

Half an hour under deft hands, an apologetic frock, an elaborate coiffure and a few skillful touches of make-up produced incomprehensible results. The whirl of the carpenters' lathes echoed tumultuously in her benumbed cerebrum as she stared at her reflection in the mirror. Formerly, whenever she had stood before a glass, it was only to meet the placid gaze of Lily Martin; but this resplendent creature suggested nothing of Tulersville.

"How pretty you look!" exclaimed Myra Flushing, one of the regulars. "You wear your clothes well, child."

"Oh, I've worn fancy clothes before!" replied Lily. "When our graduating class put on 'Romeo and Juliet,' I wore a velvet dress with a long train that came from Los Angeles. I was *Juliet*!"

"My gracious," mocked a striking brunette, "what a range of experience!"

"What have you done that you should wax sarcastic?" demanded Myra.

The brunette interposed her sinuous person between Lily and the mirror, patted her modishly corrugated hair, and smoothed a supposititious wrinkle from her very becoming dinner gown.

"I," she deigned, "have toured with one of the 'Irene' companies and have played with the Alcazar Stock in Frisco."

"You," retorted Myra, "were in the chorus of the number three 'Irene' company, and the only time you played leads with the Alcazar was when half of the company fell heir to the mumps! She parades the lot as Wanda Vorse," she explained to Lily, "but her honest-to-Lucifer name is Sadie Bechstein."

Sadie snorted and left the room.

The casting director knocked and asked for Miss Martin, and Lily followed him to the great glass-inclosed structure. Only one set was in use at the time, an ornate banquet hall.

The director was Mr. Huntley, a fussy little fellow who swaggered about with the self-esteem of a bantam, changing and re-changing details. He stopped a tall, powerfully built man who was passing, and asked him several unimportant questions, which were answered with ill-concealed impatience.

"Mr. Waring!" whispered one of the extras, and Lily recognized the name of the director general, upon whose shoulders rested a large share of the responsibility for the success of Cosmic Features.

Meeting his appraising glance she lowered her eyes. A question, an answer, a direction, and he was gone.

"Mr. Waring says you are to be retained permanently," Mr. Huntley informed Lily.

Lily's bewilderment grew. The casting director had engaged her only to fill out in this one scene, and now—it had all happened so suddenly!

She watched dumbly while Mr. Huntley pottered around, making a great pother, but producing little in the way of apparent results. At noon the company adjourned to the studio cafeteria.

They returned to another period of waiting. Finally Mr. Huntley aroused the star from an incipient siesta and turned to Lily.

"If you are to remain with us," he said, "I might as well give you a little tryout now. You go up to the head of the table with Mr. Ordway."

He assigned the other extras to their places around the board.

"Now, Miss Martin," he resumed, "you are to be toying with your fork until Mr. Ordway takes your hand. Then you must turn and look at him coquettishly."

Lily obediently directed a wide-eyed gaze at Ordway.

"No, no!" fussed Huntley. "Put a little expression in your face! Look pleased."

With a tremendous tug at her facial muscles Lily twisted her lips into a frozen smile.

"Put some life into your eyes, can't cha?"

Lily opened them yet more widely.

"What do you think you are," screamed the little man, "a calf?"

He blustered and nagged until Lily be-

came petrified with fright. Her lips quivered and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Hell!" snarled Mr. Huntley. "Now you're going to bawl!"

He tore off his coat, threw it on the floor, and danced up and down on it.

"Get up!" he yelled.

Placing Lily where her back would be to the camera he called upon Sadie Bechstein to do the bit.

Lily waited miserably until the scene had been rehearsed and photographed. Then she rushed to her dressing room, flung herself into a chair and yielded to her distress. Myra placed an arm about her.

"My dear!" she remonstrated. "What has happened? Has Mount Huntley been erupting again?"

Lily recounted with punctuating sobs the tragedy of the afternoon. "And now," she concluded, "Mr. Waring won't want to keep me after all!"

"Don't worry," soothed Myra. "Mr. Huntley's opinion means very little to Mr. Waring. Everybody knows the little mutt's contract is not going to be renewed."

"If I don't make good I'll have to go back to Tulersville. I tried several other companies without getting anything, and the money papa gave me is almost gone."

"Is Tulersville so terrible?"

"There's no society there or anything! And there won't be a thing for me to do except—marry Robert! Of course, Robert's awfully nice, quite the nicest boy in town, and people say I should be glad to get him, but—"

"I know," sympathized Myra. "I think he must be like my first husband. Well, if you are set upon having a career, don't try to mix it with matrimony! Take it from a three-timer!"

Lily's mind was so engrossed with forebodings that she allowed the street car to carry her several blocks past her station. Rather than draw upon her diminishing funds for another fare, she trudged the weary mile back to her rooming house. When she reached her street, the city's incandescent garden was beginning to blossom in the dusk.

A tall figure emerged from the shadows of the porch.

"Why, Robert!" exclaimed Lily, with as much surprise as her tired senses could muster.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" said the boy. "Why, Lily! What have they been doing to you? I always was against this movie business! You come back to Tulersville with me, won't you?"

He enfolded her listless body in his arms. "Please don't," begged Lily. "Some other time I can talk to you, but I'm so tired now."

She climbed the stairs to her tiny bedroom, and threw herself upon the rickety little iron cot, with its hard, thin mattress.

By the pitiful glow of her one ineffectual light she saw herself as Robert's wife, plodding through her daily round of cooking, scrubbing, mending and back-yard gossip. Perhaps there would be smudgy-faced children, like the Gibbons's, and Robert would smoke a smelly pipe, with his stockinged feet resting on the center table!

II.

THE next day Sadie bustled into the dressing room, gathered together her belongings, and left without a word. It was understood that when the rushes of the preceding day's scene were run off in the projection room, the officials present were so pleased with her work that they had decided to promote her to seconds.

The remainder of the week crept by with cruel deliberation, made tolerable only by Myra Flushing's understanding; but the end of the week brought nothing more terrible than a pay check. Lily told Robert that she could never, never return to Tulersville.

She followed the usual routine—maids, "atmosphere" and unimportant bits. What would have been a notable income in Tulersville was scarcely more than an existence in Hollywood. Under Myra's tutelage, all of her spare time and money were consumed in self-improvement. She beat a path from the dancing master's to the hairdresser's, with many stops in between. Anything that was purely imitative she could do mechanically. While working in her scenes, she watched others and aped

them almost without conscious effort. When not working she watched the stars with unquestioning awe.

The announcement of Mme. Halska's coming increased her interest. Sadie Bechstein brought the news.

"Well, revisiting the scenes of your childhood?" inquired Myra as Sadie struck a pose in the doorway. But Sadie was all graciousness.

"Did you know," she asked, after a few honeyed words of greeting to each of the girls, "that Mme. Halska is soon to arrive at the studio to make a picture?"

She paused, smiling at the chorus of exclamations.

"I seen—saw her two seasons ago in New York," she continued, the tone of her voice changing, "and, let me tell you, she's old enough to be mother to the whole profession! That map of hers would stop a mad dog. As for being Polish—m'gawd! Avenue A's swarming with her relatives! She may get by with her line of hokum with footlights and distance to lend enchantment to the view, but when she faces the camera, she'll look like nothing but the big hunk of cheese she is. She'll make one picture on her reputation—and then she won't have any reputation!"

"I wonder who'll direct her," said one of the girls.

"None other than Mr. Waring himself! It was specified in her contract. They have secured the rights of 'The Sins of Cyril,' by Marie Dellyn, for her picture. They say the old dame's temperamental as Hades, so some of us can look forward to a grand time!"

"'The Sins of Cyril,'" mused Myra. "That has a small vampire part in it with one big scene that can't very well be cut out. A good chance for some one who can act but isn't young nor beautiful enough to attract attention away from the madame."

She turned to her self-appointed task of arranging Lily's beautiful hair in silence.

There was little silence attendant upon Mme. Halska's advent. Ten minutes after the appearance of herself and retinue, everybody was flying hither and yon, with mad haste and vague motives. Her bodyguard included a secretary, a maid, a

chauffeur, a turbaned Hindu, and a self-willed Belgian police dog. The dapper little cigarette fiend who brought up the rear turned out to be her husband, but nobody ever fathomed the *raison d'être* of the Hindu.

Mr. Waring and a company official who had accompanied her from New York escorted her to her dressing-room.

"That!" she exclaimed unbelievably, when Mr. Waring proudly pointed it out. "It will never do! Never!"

Illustrating with supple, restless hands, she proved that nothing was satisfactory—location, lighting, appointments—nothing!

Mr. Waring did not tell her of the weeks that had been spent preparing the place under his personal supervision, but quietly invited her to select for herself. In the end, a partition was removed between two of the offices in the administration building, and the interior redecorated to adumbrate the madame's temperament.

She exhibited the same captious discrimination in the selection of her supporting cast and the supervision of the erection of sets.

Lily was watching her from a respectful distance as she and Mr. Waring were inspecting a half-finished drawing-room interior, when Mr. Waring excused himself and left Mme. Halska to continue her tour of inspection alone. As she came opposite Lily, she paused and smiled benignantly.

"What lovely hair you have, my dear! What is your name?"

Lily answered shyly.

"Oh, that will never do! Of course, it is a very pretty name, but hardly distinctive enough for professional purposes. Don't you think you should have one a little more—*distingué*?"

"Yes'm," responded Lily.

Mme. Halska drew from her the salient bits of Lily's history, and gave freely in return of advice from her vast store of experience.

"And never," she concluded, as she caught sight of a dapper little cigarette fiend chatting with a henna blonde, "marry if you want a career!"

Lily frequently basked in the effulgence of the madame's benevolence, but Myra

was bathed in a less pleasant light. Myra had laid her case before Mr. Waring, and with the madame's approval, been awarded the vampire rôle.

"If I don't do good work," she complained, "I get hauled over the coals; and if I do get worked up to a high pitch, I am pulled down with a jerk. I shall certainly deserve whatever reward I get out of this, but my hair will be so gray that I won't be able to do anything but old hags!"

It was the day she was to do the big scene that made her part so necessary to the story, that she rushed into the dressing-room, tore off her gaudy clothing, and threw it at a chair.

"Are you through already?" asked Lily.

"Through!" screamed Myra. "I'm out! The madame's had all she can bear of me! Somebody else is to take my place!"

"I'm sorry," sympathized Lily.

"I'm not!" retorted Myra fervently. "I'm glad! Oh, if I ever so much as have to look at that thin-haired, flat-hipped caricature again, I'll claw out her eyes!"

She rose to answer a knock at the door. It was one of Mr. Waring's assistants.

"Mr. Waring says that Miss Martin is to take Miss Flushing's place," he announced. "Mme. Halska asked for her. She's to be ready to do the big scene in the morning."

Myra closed the door and turned to Lily.

"You! A vampire!" She laughed weakly, but became suddenly serious. "Be it so," she said. "If you are to begin home-wrecking in the morning, you had better start training at once."

Lily donned a snaky green gown and followed Myra from one end of the dressing-room to the other, simulating her serpentine glide. Then came harrowing lessons in the handling of a cigarette and the other arts of the modern Delilah. After an afternoon of Myra's intensive discipline, her head ached and her body was tremulous with fatigue.

A night of eerie dreams ended in a morning of apprehensive agitation. Lily trembled as Myra applied her makeup, seizing her by the shoulders and glaring into her eyes.

"Listen to me!" she commanded.

"You're going to be a wonderful success! Mr. Waring himself is directing you, and you have nothing to fear from Mme. Halska. You are about the only person in the studio she has taken a liking to. Stop trembling!"

Again Lily beheld a strange creature in the mirror. A glittering green gown clung to her supple figure, her chestnut hair was dressed high on her head, long jade earrings hung in her ears, and her eyes had been lengthened into mysterious, exotic slits. She felt a gathering confidence as Myra and the other girls rhapsodized over her appearance.

All conversation on the set ceased as Lily glided forward, with undulations that would have graced the Serpent of the Nile.

"Don't you think she might be a little immature for the part?" whispered Mme. Halska to Mr. Waring.

"Not as much so as I thought she would be when you suggested her," he retorted.

Lily thrilled under his approving smile.

As Myra had done the same scene the day before, all necessary preparations had been made, and rehearsals began at once.

Mr. Waring related in detail the action of the episode and its bearing upon the story. Bit by bit, he led Lily through the business as he had worked it out, explaining the significance and purpose of each motion. He finally summoned the actor who was impersonating the siren's victim, and asked for the scene in its entirety.

Again and again he commanded that the thing be reenacted, until Lily had lost all trace of indecision and could deliver the least important gesture with the perfection of an automaton. But Mr. Waring was unsatisfied.

"We'll have lunch and a little rest," he said, patting Lily's shoulder, "and then try again. I know we can do better."

Lily ate hastily and returned to her dressing-room to freshen her makeup.

"I don't know," she replied, when Myra asked about her progress. "I can go through the scene all right, but Mr. Waring seems to want something more." Her lip quivered. "I'm afraid I can't make good!"

"You're just nervous," Myra reassured her. "You must not let go!"

She made Lily rest until she was calm again.

"Don't forget," she admonished her, in parting. "A million eyes will be watching you through that camera lens! They will expect a thrill! Don't disappoint them!"

Mr. Waring started rehearsals again as soon as he arrived, but soon called a halt.

"Miss Martin," he said, "you don't get under the skin of your character. You must *feel*! This woman has lost her hold on her victim. When she pleads, it is for her future! She may be facing starvation! When she realizes that her entreaties are useless, she feels hate—hate for this man who is throwing her away, as if she were a toy!"

He labored and exhorted until his collar was damp with perspiration, but gained only a slight improvement. People from other stages began to gather around as they finished their work.

"I believe it will film well enough," said Mme. Halska. "You can at least try it."

Mr. Waring motioned to the camera men, who took their places, one where his apparatus would embrace the entire set, and the other where he could get a close-up of the action at the fireplace.

Lily lit a fresh cigarette and reclined upon a *chaise-longue*, placed well forward, immediately in front of the first camera. She tried to suppress an enveloping agitation by reminding herself that she must not "let go." It might mean Tulersville!

Mr. Waring raised a megaphone to his lips:

"*Lights!*"

The set was flooded with a brilliant, ghastly glare. Lily became tense.

"*Camera!*"

The little box in front of Lily began to click as the camera man turned the crank. What was that Myra had said? "A million eyes— They will expect a thrill!"

In place of the camera man, Lily saw a boundless audience, expectant faces upturned in the semidarkness, a great orchestra—herself on the screen, the cynosure of eager eyes!

"*Action!*"

Her veins tingled with the thrill of inspiration of the actor who steps before the

footlights and a crowded auditorium. She puffed her cigarette with studied languor.

A tall, cadaverous individual appeared between the curtains at the back. Lily turned slightly, conscious that the camera was getting her full face, and smiled. When the man crossed over to the fireplace, her eyes widened with surprise.

She arose slowly, slithered snakily across the room, and placed her white arms about his neck. He removed them. She registered amazement and incredulity full in the lens of the second camera.

The man walked to the *chaise-longue* and flicked his cigarette ash into a tray. Lily followed him, tossed her cigarette aside, again placed her arms around his neck, and raised her lips to his. He petulantly pushed her away.

He was through, he said, through!

Lily pleaded and begged, but he only sneered. She gasped. Tulersville— Her lips babbled incoherently, and her eyes smarted with burning tears.

He turned away and started for the door. She dried her tears.

Then you are through!

He nodded, and again started for the door.

Her eyes narrowed venomously, and her features writhed with hate. She was, indeed, the Woman Scorned!

She took a stiletto from the table and called to him. He returned uncertainly.

She broke into a torrent of recrimination and abuse, approaching him step by step. Suddenly she raised the stiletto. He caught her wrist, but she struggled until she wrenched it free. The steel flashed. The man reeled, and fell at her feet.

She raised the stiletto and gloated— smiled and gloated—

"Hold it!" yelled the man with the "still" camera.

Lily held the pose until the camera clicked and a "still" to be used in the advertisement had been taken. Then she lowered her arm and looked about her.

Two dozen people were watching her in amazed silence, and she fancied she detected satisfaction in Mr. Waring's eyes. She glided toward him and smiled archly. He flushed slightly and began to rustle

among his papers. Mme. Halska's eyes were expressionless.

The crowd respectfully made a pathway, and Lily glided through to her dressing-room.

III.

SEVERAL days went by without Lily being called for her other scenes. She hailed Mr. Waring's assistant as he was passing her window and asked if he knew when she was going to make them. He stammered a little and replied that he believed the scenario had been revised in such a way that she would not need to do any more.

"Mme. Halska," he said, "has everything about as she wants it. She has even had the title changed to 'What Women Don't Know,' because 'The Sins of Cyril' put too much emphasis on the male lead!"

"That woman!" exclaimed Myra. "I can't see how the picture can be made intelligible without retaking my scenes, but if the madame wants them left out, they will be left out!"

It seemed that they were to be left out, because Lily was not summoned again.

The final scene was photographed, and all of the exposed film cut and roughly assembled for a first complete showing.

Lily sat trembling in the semidarkness of the projection-room as the first part of the picture was thrown upon the screen. It meant nothing to her excited brain. She could only wait for her scene. The only tangible impression she received was the image of Sadie Bechstein. She had not known that Sadie was in the cast.

An hour of agony passed, and, finally, there it was—her scene! She could see herself right down in front— But no, the girl on the *chaise-longue* had black hair!

It was Sadie Bechstein!

Lily crushed her handkerchief to her lips and rushed out into the corridor. Her body shook with the surging sobs, and she leaned against a window for support.

So she had been a failure, after all!

She could see a comedy company staging a flirtation scene in a little park outside. Beyond them, another group of actors in makeup were climbing into a bus to go out on location.

She sighed convulsively, knowing that she could never be one of them again.

"Here she is!"

Lily quickly dried her eyes and turned.

"Miss Martin," said a studio attendant, "this young man insisted on seeing you. Said it was a matter of life and death."

"Lily," said Robert, eagerly grasping her hand, "I'm just going through town on my way to San Diego. I've got a job in a garage down there. Now you can marry me, and you won't have to go back to Tullersville! You will come, won't you?"

He took her bowed head as a sign of assent.

"I knew you would!" he exclaimed. "See! I've got the engagement ring with me! I know it'll fit, because your mother found one of the stage rings you wore in 'Romeo and Juliet,' and I got this one the same size."

He slipped the ring on her finger and patted her hand.

The exhibition in the projection-room came to an end, and those who had been watching it began to come out into the corridor. Mr. Waring caught sight of Lily and broke away from the little group. His eyes detected tears on the girl's cheeks.

"Did you see the picture?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Lily, "but—"

"It's all right, little girl," broke in the director, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I know what you are going to say. I'm sorry there was no chance for me to see you and explain beforehand."

"Explain?" repeated Lily mechanically. "But if I was a failure—"

"You weren't a failure. If you've got the courage, little girl, to stick. "He looked down into her eyes. Lily's heart began to beat wildly.

"What do you mean?" she gasped.

"We had to put another actress in your place much against our will," Mr. Waring explained, "because Mme. Halska insisted upon it. In her opinion you overacted. In my opinion your work proved that you can be intrusted with a part in my next two productions. If you make good in these I may assign you the vampire rôle in a big serial scheduled for the first of the year."

Mr. Waring hurried on. Lily raised her head. So she was not a failure after all!

She drew the ring from her finger and returned it to its donor. "I'm sorry, Robert," she said, "but I have my career!"



THE SWEET CONSPIRATOR

WHEN Winter gallops down the Pass,
 His squadron shod with frost,
 The velvet greenness of the grass
 Roughens until a brownish mass,
 A gift of beauty lost.
 When Winter thunders down the Pass,
 The youth within me sighs: "Alas!"

But when, but when sweet barefoot Spring
 Comes softly stealing up
 With gentle, coaxing airs that bring
 Back silver songs to birds that sing,
 Gold to the buttercup,
 When she returns, sweet barefoot Spring,
 Youth whispers: "Come, another fling!"

Richard Butler Glaenzer.

The Fear-Sway

by Kenneth Perkins

Part III



Author of "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

PETER'S MESSENGER.

ALL that morning Jennie Lee had been waiting for news of the man hunt. She understood that her grandfather, true to the traditions of the Vigilantes for many years past, had kept the maneuvers of his posse a secret. But news of the raiding of Lingo's ranch had reached town, and a big mob had gathered about the sheriff's office urging immediate and drastic action.

Jennie waited impatiently in her grandfather's suite, sending out her maid and the Cholo servant to get what news they could amid the confusion at the city hall and newspaper office. All she was able to learn from her servants was the fact that Sheriff Martin was appointing some deputies, and that a Federal agent of the Indian Commission was starting some sort of an investigation.

Momentarily she expected to hear that her grandfather had been shot by some sniper of the Gila's gang. A still more possible eventuality in her mind concerned the man who, she believed, was fighting the Gila alone. The whole town had forgotten Tom Drury and his vow.

News leaked out early which Peter Gaunt had tried to keep secret. It was received by the people of Cattleoe like word of a victorious battle. When the Cholo ran up to the suite and breathlessly told her story, Jennie Lee thanked God. To her grandfather the capture of the Gila would mean so much.

The Vigilantes Committee—so the citizens of Cattleoe were given to understand—had captured the Gila asleep near the crest of the desert mesa. The chief of the Vigilantes, playing his usual cautious hand, had spirited his catch away into the mountains, preferring to deal with him as the Vigilantes of the frontier days had dealt with their victims.

Sheriff Martin, who feared a lynching in the streets of the city, was glad enough to wash his hands of the affair; and most of the citizens took his view of the matter.

Meanwhile Jennie Lee tried to pass insufferable hours of waiting. She paced up and down the big suite of rooms; then, tiring of this, she went downstairs to the little fly-infested lobby of the hotel and listened to the loungers debating and quarreling over every issue the great event afforded.

She even went out into the street, in

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 29,

the hope of meeting some of her grandfather's old cronies with whom she could talk. Peter Gaunt's chums, however, were nowhere in sight. They had all joined the man hunt and were at that time high up in the mountains on the way to Desolation. Jennie returned to her room.

She dressed herself in her riding habit—sombbrero, gauntlets, flannel shirt, and the maroon-colored velvet skirt. Intuitively she felt that her grandfather might need her, and that she would ride out to the range, despite any one's efforts to keep her in town.

Finally came the news which she had vaguely sensed. It was the culminating factor which made her decide definitely to ride out into the desert, but it came in an entirely different form than she had expected. A rider blustered into town with a personal message for Gaunt's granddaughter. When Clout Gomery entered the well-furnished little room which had been arranged to please the tastes of Jennie he brought with him a stablelike and not disagreeable odor of leather and horsehide.

His spurs jingled against a spindle-legged chair which, in his hurry to enter the room, he knocked over. He took off his huge sombrero, twirling it in his hand, and the girl noticed that he had stopped downstairs in the buffet for a bracer, as well as a washing.

His hair was brushed—an unusual and not very becoming touch to Clout's heavily lined, beef-red face. It was plain to be seen that his mission was a difficult one. He had postponed it as long as he possibly could.

"They sent me for to handle a very delicate subject," Clout began. "And the news I'm sent for to deliver shouldn't orter be blurred out—like the way some men generally talks."

"Something has happened to grandpa!" the girl cried.

"No'm! I'll say, *No, ma'am!* Definite! He's still alive and ridin' strong. It's about this here hell bender what busted your hoss a couple days ago."

"Hell bender! Why do you call him a hell bender?"

"I ain't figurin' you'll believe what I'm

agoin' to tell you. Your granddad told me you wouldn't believe it—but he says, 'Tell her the whole truth, Clout, and nothin' else.' So here goes—"

"He's not hurt—he's not wounded!" the girl interrupted impatiently.

"Not yet, ma'am. But I reckon he's in line for something of that there nature—"

"The Gila's gang—they've got him!"

"No'm. You might as well listen to me while I tell you. There ain't no cause for you-all to get alarmed about the discovery which your granddad found out last night. And you'll be glad to know what we know and to find that everything has came out the way it has.

"Your granddad told me particular to say to you that soon you'll be ridin' home agin to the old rancho—and to your patio and calf pens and such. The place, if I know anything, is goin' to be right peaceful—"

"I know," the girl cried impatiently. "The Gila's caught. But what about Tom Drury? You say he's in danger of being hurt—and even though the man he went after is caught!"

"That's the point, ma'am. The man he went after is Mr. Tom Drury himself! The long and the short of it is, ma'am, Tom Drury actually—if you'll believe what I'm sayin'—went after hisself."

The girl stepped back with a sudden unpleasant feeling that Clout Gomery had been drinking too much.

"You see, miss"—Clout found a softer, more modulated tone—"the man who gentled your hoss was a stranger in town, and—"

"But I don't understand," she interrupted. "You say Tom Drury is going to be killed, and then you say the man he went after is caught!"

"The man he went after is Mr. Tom Drury hisself. The man that gentled your mustang two days ago—he made out he come from a Texas ranch. Maybe he did, for all I know. But wherever he come from he was working in double harness with himself. He was his own twin, as you might say. He called himself one thing, and he was also something else. Tom Drury says

to you he'll go out and get the Gila Monster!" Clout gave a loud guffaw. "Says he'll get him! Did he! Well, it's the slick-est joke I ever did hear. Tom Drury himself is the Gila!"

"It's not true! There's a terrible mistake! I could tell he was no bandit—no murderer! Why, the Gila Monster has killed men by the dozen! Tom Drury was a cow-puncher just come to town from Texas. Some one's framed him."

"Then he's framed slicker 'n any man I ever did see—"

"Of course it's a frame-up!" she went on passionately. "It's some more of the Gila's cowardly work. Tom Drury has walked straight into a trap."

"Well, the trap was set pretty clean, if you want my opinion. What I seen of the whole business don't leave no doubt."

"Is that what the others think?"

"Sure! They're goin' to lynch him. The chief's taken him up to Desolation so's the authorities around here won't delay matters. He's not goin' to wait long before he gives the gunman the rope either. All as he wants is to stage a little investigation so's his name as fair and square Peter Gaunt won't be smirched none."

"You don't mean they're going to hang him—without a trial? Granddad wouldn't stand for that. He'll see that Tom Drury is brought safe to town at least and given into the sheriff's hands for protection."

"Lord, ma'am! If the town here heard the Gila was being brought in they would turn out with a couple barrels of dynamite for to blow him up. The chief's too plumb wise for that. But, on the other hand, this necktie party he's going to stage is goin' to be done plumb legal-like. The chief's set on it, and he wanted for me to acquaint you with that fact also, miss."

Jennie had not paid attention to Gomery's last remarks. She had knitted her brows gravely. Before Clout had finished she came to a definite decision. The Cholo and her maid had been waiting during the entire conversation, eagerly drinking in the news of their master's triumph. Jennie turned to them.

"I want my pinto saddled," she said to the Cholo. "Put on the cowboy saddle and

a nosebag with some oats. Fill two canteens with water." She turned to Gomery, who was waiting with his huge mouth open in amazement. "How long will it take to get to Desolation, Clout?"

"Longer than you could hope to ride, ma'am."

"Can we make it to Desolation before grandfather gets down to this business he calls an investigation?"

"Maybe I could, ma'am. If you want me to take any last word to the two-gun gentleman or to your granddad, I reckon I could get there in time. You see, when I last saw your granddad it was in the desert where the Gila was caught. He give me to understand that he was goin' to stop at Lingo's ranch for to see if everything they said about the Gila was straight."

"Now if you give me a message I could cut straight across the plain, trailin' into the Desolation hills from the Eastern Gap. I ain't afraid of ridin' through that gap even though the Jackson brothers was murdered there. When a woman's concerned I ain't afeered of nothin'! By doing that I could make the journey twice faster than they made it."

"Do you know the trail?" Jennie asked excitedly.

"Ma'am—I've punched up many a drag in that gap in my day. And when I say 'drag,' I mean strays that was rustled off by the Choctaws. Cattlemen never drive their herds through there. In fact, I sure wouldn't make that trip without I was heeled—and heeled with something better than this here six-gun of mine. It's a dangerous place, that gap. Lousy with the Gila's henchmen. I reckon they'll be ridin' around hoppin' mad now that their master's took in custody."

"What time did grandpa's posse leave the mesa?"

"About sunrise this mornin', ma'am."

"And they'll get to Desolation when?"

"I should say somewhere's—well, before noon."

"And if the journey were made now from here—"

"I reckon if my cayuse can climb the Eastern Bluffs I could get there somewheres around noon myself."

The Cholo came in at this point and told Jennie that her pinto was saddled, ready, and snubbed to a trough in front of the hotel.

"Lord, ma'am, you ain't—"

"Clout, you and I are going to ride through the Eastern Gap—my pinto can climb, and you and I can both handle six-guns."

Gomery tried to stammer in his astonishment, but he felt the girl's arm hooked resolutely in his. He knew there was no use denying any whim of Gaunt's granddaughter. Gaunt had always given her her way, and now she was denied by nobody, much less by Clout Gomery, who always swore he had a "good holt on the ways of wimmin!"

"I have a calico pony that can ride up cliffs," said Jennie. "And you're going to ride him."

"Well, ma'am, I reckon if you've set your heart on riding through the Eastern Gap, it ain't goin' to do for you-all to go alone. I'm goin' with you to see you get treated right, and I sure will spit lead at any one that so much as asks you where you're goin'. But that ain't nothin' compared with what old Peter Gaunt's going to do to me when we get there—and he finds out I've brung you into town. Zowie! I'm thinkin' I'll just ride to the edge of Desolation and then come back home peaceful-like!"

"Clout Gomery, you show me the trail through the Eastern Gap," Jennie replied, "and I'll be satisfied."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EASTERN GAP.

CLOUT GOMERY and Jennie, both riding little range-fed pintos, reached the foothills late that morning. A long lope over a rising plain of sage, a climb up the rocky, dry wash of a gulch, and then a slow, zigzagging ride across thickly wooded bluffs brought them up into the table land into which the Eastern Gap cut. The big gorge opened up the mountains as if a giant ax, five miles long, had smashed into the crust of the earth, open-

ing a gash of raw granite and stratified limestone.

The scene which lay before Jennie's eyes was a desolate one. No forage had ever grown in that windswept, rock-bound pass, and no cattlemen had ever driven their herds through to the wild bandit-hunted mountains beyond.

"It looks to me, ma'am, like as if we'd orter change our minds," Gomery advised, despite his boasting of a short while before. "I don't like the looks of that thar gorge. What if our horses got spavined—or broke a leg in one of them chuckholes. We couldn't get out of the cañon afore dark—and, believe me—"

"Don't look on the worst side of it," rejoined Jennie. "Our mounts have been raised up in the hills. They know how to climb rocks."

"But what if some of the Gila's gang should pop up his dirty head—say, behind us, ma'am?"

"If they appeared behind us, it would hurry our ride. And as long as we keep on riding in the same direction, I'm satisfied."

"Well, I ain't. I'm tellin' you straight, ma'am, you're ridin' somewheres that angels and honest cowmen avoids. Down to Lingo's outfit, ma'am, they steer their herds clear of this here valley—like it was Mexico."

"I'll stop when I get to Desolation," was her answer.

As they jogged on into the deeper recesses of the gulch the cliffs behind them shut off the last glimpse of the open plain. The scene grew more desolate, with its shrubbery of greasewood and its gaunt sprinkling of cholla cactus and cow skulls. Although high above them the granite bluffs were full in the glare of the desert sun, and quivering in a haze of heat, the narrow trail at the bottom of the cañon was in continual shadow.

Gomery grew more and more lugubrious. He realized now that it was a foolhardy step to accompany her into this cañon, a place so barely frequented that brand blotters often used it as a cache for their stolen drags. While he was reproaching her for her rash act he called her attention to a thin wisp

of cloud rising from the depths of the cañon in front of them and purpling the crags beyond.

"There are some riders!" he affirmed. "Perhaps cattle. If it's cattle, take my word they are stolen mavericks, and we'll be meetin' up with a bunch of the Gila's rustlers."

She rode on for a few moments, studying the haze of dust. Gomery dropped behind and called to her to stop.

Straight ahead, at a distance of about a mile, the trail led between two huge boulders which all but obstructed their path. Indeed, the boulders themselves were so situated as to resemble the posts of a gateway.

"A gang of robbers could hide behind there," Clout called out. "Like as not the Gila always keeps a man there as a guard. One man could stop a regiment by hiding behind one of them rocks."

Jennie drew rein.

"Is there any other trail to Desolation?" she asked, for a brief flash faltering in her determination.

"None through this gorge—you can see. The walls come down sheer. What I advises to do is to go back to the mouth of the gap and trail up the hills."

"Then when might we be able to get to Desolation?"

"I can't tell. It would take a couple hours longer mebbe. But I ain't goin' to risk them bowlders, ma'am. I feel like as if I was goin' to be potted from every direction."

"A couple of hours would be too late," she said. "As it is now, we might not get to Desolation until after Tom Drury is hanged."

"I'll say agin, ma'am, I ain't goin' to pass them rocks. I've changed my mind about goin' to Desolation with you. Tom Drury can hang—damned if I liked his looks, anyway, when I seen him this mornin'."

"I'll go alone, then. You're turning pale, and I don't figure your six-gun will do me much good. Better ride home and have a bracer."

"Look here, ma'am," Clout began. "I don't want to let you go ridin' through

there alone. I'm nacherly chivalrouslike. But I'm goin' to stick to what I said! I'm goin' home where they's a sheriff!"

"I'll stick to what I said, too," she replied, digging her heels again into the pinto's flanks.

Clout watched her as her horse jogged along uncertainly, stumbling over the rocks, lagging in the sand, shying at the sudden appearance of cholla cactus under his very nose. The echo of his hoofs grew fainter, until Jennie was lost to view in the distant gloom of the cañon's bottom.

Jennie Lee rode on until she came to the gate of bowlders. She drew rein when within a bare hundred yards of the opening, and listened. There was no sound left now of the echoing of clattering hoofs. Even the wind had died, so that it seemed that there was not a breath of life or a sound of any living thing in that dreary graveyard of rocks, sand, and cactus. Hesitating did no good, she well knew, and to turn and flee down the cañon would be a surrender of her entire game. The only thing was to press on through the opening and take what luck would come.

As she trotted her horse into the gate, she noticed him prance slightly, throw up his head and sniff through distended nostrils.

This she understood too well was a definite signal that there was some living thing behind the rock. A whinny told the rest of the story.

She reined in abruptly, only in time to draw up face to face with two horsemen mounted on little ratlike pintos. At the same instant another, who was on foot, dropped down from the crest of the rocks so that he landed directly behind her. This man was a giant negro.

She looked around at the faces of the three desperadoes. They were a shabby crew with big Mexican sombreros, black flannel shirts, leather chaps. Their faces were grim, hideous, unshaven, and the girl caught a glimpse of all of them smiling, showing teeth, some broken, some yellow with tobacco.

"Where you-all goin', lady?" the leader asked. He was a little man with high-hunched shoulders and foxlike eyes.

"Up to Desolation." She mustered up a voice which trembled and choked.

"What for are you-all goin' up to Desolation?"

"I guess you know."

"How do you mean we know? Don't gag. Answer me straight. What for are you-all goin' to Desolation?"

The other two closed in, and one of the men clutched the reins of her mount.

"There's going to be a hanging up there," she stammered.

"We know that. But why should a little lady like you ride all this distance for to see a hanging?"

"Take your hands off the reins of my horse," she said coolly.

"I will, like hell! Where do you think you are, anyhow, a Jane like you!—comin' along up here and givin' us orders! Did you get that, men? She tells me to take my hands off'n her reins!"

The others joined him in a laugh, displaying again the tobacco-stained teeth.

"What's the hanging to you, miss?" the leader asked again, his little fox eyes riveted on her face.

"It's a lot to me!" she cried, reassured by the angry note of her own voice.

"She can't be one of the Vigilantes," the negro remarked. "They ain't no women servin' on the Vigilantes—none that I ever heard tell of."

"Of course I'm not one of the Vigilantes," she snapped out. "Let my horse's head alone, or the Gila will make you answer for everything you do."

The men exchanged glances. For a moment they were at a loss what to say. Finally the leader burst out again into a jeer.

"I reckon the Gila ain't goin' to give you much help."

"He will when the lynch party is broken up!" the girl shot back.

Again the men looked at each other with questioning glances. What the girl had said upset their calculations.

"We didn't hear nothin' about the lynchin' party being busted up," the leader went on carefully. "We heard tell from a Choc-taw who passed by Lingo's ranch this mornin' that the Vigilantes has got our chief

and has took him up to Desolation so's he can work a quick hangin' without the law interferin'!"

"Then he is your chief," the girl said with a smile of relief.

The men saw the smile and some of the worry that had fogged their faces cleared away.

"Look here, lady, who are you?" the fox asked.

"Don't you know who I am?"

"We could make a pretty good guess, bein' as how you say you're goin' up to Desolation—and ackcherly through this here gap—which ain't supposed to be no highway for the Vigilantes gang."

"I'll tell you who I am if you tell me what you men are doing here."

"You know already, lady, that we belong to the Gila's gang. I'm just through tellin' you that myself. We're of his gang and we're doin' his work. I'm Drigges—Slinkey Drigges. Might you've heard of me! Any stranger what comes gallopin' along up this trail generally gets acquainted with me. The Gila give me orders to introduce myself. But I will say this—he never told me what to do in case a woman come—and a woman ridin' alone and on a lathery horse in a hurry to attend his hangin'."

"If you belong to the Gila's gang, why are you men waiting down here while he's up in Desolation in the hands of the Vigilantes and on the brink of being killed?"

"Who are you that's askin' us these here pointed questions, lady?"

"I'm the Gila's sweetheart," she said coolly.

The negro at the horse's head let go of the reins and stepped back. The others stared for a moment incredulously.

"I've heard tell that there's a gal back there in Cattleoe that the Gila's had a fancy to," Slinkey Drigges said. "But I didn't reckon that he'd confessed to any woman alive just who he was. Why, ma'am, if you'll believe it, they ain't a man on this here range who knows just who the Gila really is. We ain't never seen him ourselves. That's why the chief's never been in danger once yet. He's an all-powerful man, lady, and if you're his sweetheart you're sure goin' to be the queen of a al-

mighty powerful bunch of hell-benders among which you can count us three humble blotchers."

"You say you have never seen the Gila?" she asked guardedly.

"Never, lady—that is, never so far as we knows. Might we've seen him—every one's seen him, but they don't know him when they see him. Why, ma'am, he's so plumb successful with this here game of hide-and-seek of hisn that he can go ridin' into Cattleeos in broad daylight and no one pays any attention to him."

"Well, I, of course, know him," she explained freely and with a palpable note of relief in her voice. "He is a very tall man with a sunburned face, and sharp, steady eyes. Now that he is in trouble, of course, every one on the range will know him. His game as an incognito king is lost. But his game against the Vigilantes is not lost. He must be saved. His men must rally around him now and fight to the last drop of blood."

"Them's fine sentiments, lady—but—"

"There's no 'but' about it. If he heard that his gang was forsaking him now that he is at last caught, what do you think he would do if he ever escaped from the Vigilantes and came back?"

The men sobered at this thought, and oaths of dismay and horror answered the girl. "He sure would pump us so full of lead that you couldn't lift us without you had a derrick!" little Slinkey Driggs remarked.

"Then why is it you're here?" she asked pointedly.

Driggs looked around dumbly at his two companions for an answer.

"Well, if you want to know the truth, lady," he said, "I'll tell yer. You see, now that he's took by the Vigilantes, his rule has sort of gone up in smoke. We don't know which way to turn, so to speak."

"Why can't three of you, armed, do something?"

"Three of us ag'in' the Vigilantes!" Slinkey cried. "What chanst would we have? We heard tell that they's over a dozen of the Vigilantes ridin', and they're all crack men."

"Then you're afraid?"

"Sure, we're afraid. Plumb scairt to death. Without our chief we can't do nothin'. If you want me to admit it, ma'am, I'll say I'm petrified with fear."

"I ain't rarin' to go fighting too much myself," the nigger added. "Can't do nothin' now. I ain't goin' to throw no gun on them Vigilantes. They all got fast mounts and clean guns. I'll agree that I'm tremblin' all over with panic at the thought of goin' up thar to Desolation."

"Me, too," the half-breed Mexican added. "I am a brave man, but now my heart is beating thump, thump, like dat."

"If you men are all afraid of meeting the Vigilantes in a gunfight," said Jennie, "I have a plan by which we can save our master and do it so there won't be any chance of losing. There'll be gun-play, but the Vigilantes will lose. I will ride straight into town and tell them I've been lost—chased by rustlers—anything. With a situation like that—one of us working inside of the enemy's lines and the rest outside ready to start shooting any minute—we ought to win easily."

"But the danger, lady—the odds them Vigilantes has on us—"

"What will that matter when you consider the reward?"

"I reckon the reward the Gila will slip out to us will sure be somethin' worth considerin'," Driggs admitted.

"I'll see that you get your reward," she urged. "Every one of you."

"Will you see that it's enough to last us the rest of our lives?" Driggs asked.

"I'll promise anything. The Gila will be generous."

"He has that name among us, lady," Driggs agreed. "Them as is on his side he treats proper. I will say that." He turned to the other three. "What do you say, men? Will it be worth the game?"

"We'll follow the gal to Desolation," the nigger replied. "And if her plan looks like we'll sure win, and get a big swag, then Ah'm agreed."

"All right, you gents hop to your cayuses," Driggs said. "We'd orter reach Desolation by noon if we ride on through the gap."

When they were all mounted, they

wheeled their horses and followed the girl at a smart canter up into the remoter fastness of the cañon.

CHAPTER XV.

DESOLATION TOWN.

AS Peter Gaunt and his posse climbed higher into the mountains they passed from the hot sunlight of the foothills into the shadow of the peaks. Before reaching the little shelf of land where Desolation stood they found themselves in the cool uplands, while the plains below still shimmered in the midday heat.

The little, old, forsaken town was clearly visible to Tom Drury as the stage road rounded the shoulder of a hill, preparatory to cutting down into the main street. The first shack which they passed loomed like an eyeless skull, streaked white and gray with wind and sand and rain. The center street was a silent corridor between rows of shacks, abandoned saloons, dance halls, and gambling dens. A dreary wind struck up a consistent and monotonous song through the rotten old leaves. A loosened sash banged without rhythm.

Tom was impressed with the terrific wildness of the scene. Deserts cannot be so lonely as a "ghost town." The ancient dens evoked scenes of forgotten brawls and murders—their façades warped and unsightly, hideous, untenanted, forgotten—graves under the sun.

Drury pictured the old gamblers, the miners, drunk with their wealth, the muckers hurling streaks of fire into the street, the croupiers frisking cards, and the dance girls pounding away at some uproarious jig tune.

Sandwiched between a dance hall and a shack which had once been a barber shop and hot-dog stand, there stood a rickety old building with a sign which still retained a modicum of its garish paint. "Sheriff's Office" were the half-obliterated words.

Peter Gaunt drew rein before this gray, warped building. A flock of reverent memories came to him. His father had been sheriff in this town fifty years before, and it was in this office that judge and jury

had gathered and passed judgment on Gaunt's captured outlaws. Justice had been dealt them whenever they fell into the older Gaunt's hands. But it had been justice of the sternest, most inexorable kind.

Peter Gaunt, the younger, had now grown to be an old man, and he realized that the fame of the family name was dwindling rapidly away. And it was not dwindling for lack of outlaws to hang. There was something heartrending about the real truth. During the last five years of Peter Gaunt's life he had seen the name gradually but consistently lose all of its old grandeur. His failure to get the Gila was the thing uppermost in men's minds.

"But now," he said to himself, "I have got him! And I am going to deal with him as my father dealt with the long string of outlaws of which this Gila is the last."

It thus happened that Gaunt had a whim as he entered into Desolation—a whim which he gratified. He announced to his posse that he would have the trial in the courtroom where his father's criminals had been condemned fifty years before.

Henry Sugg, nonchalantly rolling a cigarette, suggested that a regular trial would delay matters and before they knew it the sheriff from Cattleose would be riding up with a posse to call the whole game off.

"This is a job for the Vigilantes," little Marty Lingo also protested. "And the Vigilantes is supposed to do things quick."

"And fair," Gaunt added conclusively.

The posse dismounted in front of the sheriff's office, and horses were snubbed at a rotten old water trough which to all appearances had been dry for half a century. Crater, being by nature an unsociable horse, was tied apart.

"Now we got the town to ourselves," Gaunt announced. "There's no one ever passes through here for nothin'—exceptin' maybe coyotes and tarantulas. But just because we're going to pull off a hanging don't mean that we can't do it civilized like, as they did in my father's day."

"If you're plumb set on making this here party legal, why not have the trial after the hanging?" Marty Lingo suggested. "Then, if the sheriff comes along, we

could tell him, 'Sorry, sheriff, but the meetin's over. You're too late. The Vigilantes has done what they promised to do ever since the Gila came to the range.'"

"I figure that would be all right," Gaunt said, "exceptin' in that case you couldn't have a trial by jury. And I'm set on givin' this here bird a trial by jury since he's swearin' so hard that he's innocent."

"You could call it a coroner's jury," Marty continued, "and the trial we could say was a inquest. I figure what this bird needs is a inquest, and not a trial."

"My dad and his Vigilantes didn't do things thataway," Gaunt replied. "And this here committee is going to be a committee like what my dad headed in this very town half a century ago."

"We'll set in on any game you say," Marty finally agreed. "All as you have to do, chief, is to name what sort of a pot it's to be—and we're playin' according."

Henry Sugg, who had been listening expectantly, finally laughed.

"Let him have his trial, chief," he said. "He's actually accused me of having a hand in his game, and I reckon a trial with the exhibits you've brought along will clear my name even if it doesn't accomplish much else."

One of the horsemen was stationed at the trough to watch the mounts in case any renegade was hanging about, and the rest of them went in.

It was a dim, musty room, and the men at first stumbled over broken chairs, catching spurs in the rotten old boards. The front room of the sheriff's office had been turned into a bar during the last days of Desolation—a mute testimony to its ultimate degeneracy. Over the bar was the cracked mottled mirror, from above which an owl gibbered and flopped to the window, zigzagging blindly into the sunlight.

"There ain't going to be much more time give to the ceremony, gents, before the countryside knows of our doin's," Gaunt said, "so I reckon this here trial has got to be finished up pronto. Now in a regular court you have a presiding judge, which will be me."

"I reckon that's all righto, chief," the members assented.

"It is also important for to see, so that the case is presented with all its ins and outs, that we have a bird they call the prosecutin' attorney. Now, these here prosecutin' attorneys in Cattleoe, I've noticed, figure that in order to earn their salt they have to spiel a lot about matters that to me never seemed to have much to do with the game that was goin' on. Some of 'em seems to want to shoot in a hand of pinochle when the game's draw-poker. Now the attorney we're going to have this time is got to deal his cards fast and fair so's we can hang the prisoner just as the sun's at noon. We don't want no legal speeches about habeas corpus and circumstantial evidence and all that stuff."

"Then how are you going to prove me guilty," Tom Drury asked, "if you are objecting to circumstantial evidence? That's all the evidence you've got."

Every one turned to the prisoner, surprised at his remark. It struck them as peculiar that the Gila should object to the method of his conviction.

Gaunt did not consider the objection of grave importance. He ordered his men to move a broken-legged table to one end of the room, while he placed a box behind.

"This is where the judge is to set," he explained. "It's the very table my dad's prisoners used to stand on before it was kicked from under to let 'em hang. Over in that there chair will set the prosecutin' attorney, which, if it is hereby agreed by all, will be Marty Lingo. Marty Lingo has the main grievance ag'in' the prisoner, bein' as how it was his place as was raided last night."

"I agree to that, chief," the baldheaded little cownan said. "But I'm warning you I don't know much about trials and such. Went to one in Cattleoe concernin' the water in my creek—but there weren't no prisoner so fur as I remember."

"I reckon you'll be all right, Marty," Gaunt said. "If you ain't never been to any trials, I reckon you'll punch up your arguments like an old cow dog, instead of gettin' lost in a lot of highfalutin' Latin."

Marty Lingo took his place in the corner of the room near a dirty window pane, where some big flies began to pester him.

"We got our prisoner," Gaunt went on, "so all we have to appoint for a regular trial is a attorney for the dee-fense. Now, whoever of you bullwhackers wants to ack for the dee-fense of this crook, I want to tell you this first: you got to present the facts of his side of the case slick and some speedy. No changing the reins from one hand to the other and arguin' for both sides like a man who's tryin' to set in a bucking saddle and can't make his mind up. I'll appoint some one, and then he's got to figure out wunst and for all whether he's arguin' for this guy or ag'in' him. I don't want him to start out sayin' the bird's innocent and then change his mind in the middle of the case. It would confuse the jury. The attorney for the dee-fense has got to choose first whether his client is guilty or innocent—and then stick to it."

"I reckon you won't find any one that's goin' to shift his arguments much while ridin' *this* horse," Marty Lingo remarked.

"In all fairness to this here prisoner," Gaunt said, "I'm going to appoint as his attorney any single one of you gents as thinks he's innocent. If we appoint a attorney for the dee-fense who thinks he's guilty there won't be no use our wastin' our time stagin' this trial. Might as well hang him and, as Marty suggests, have a inquest instead. How about you, Blow-fly?" the chief said, turning to one of his men. "Will you plead for this hell bender?"

"I sure will plead he's as plumb guilty as hell!"

"Then, is there any one else here who'll handle his case for him? Come on, some one of you puncher-gents! We want a trial. Got to have a attorney for the dee-fense, and every one as is left will be on the jury."

He turned from one face to the other, but all he could see was the set mouths under the broad, lop-brimmed hats and the smiling face of Henry Sugg through a thin veil of blue smoke.

Gaunt turned to Tom Drury.

"It looks to me, stranger, like as if the jury was only going to hear one argument, and that is an argument settin' forth that you look up a tree without no hesitatin'."

The proceedings were interrupted at this point by the entrance of the Vigilante who had been left in the street to guard the horses.

"There's a rider comin' into town, chief!" he cried.

Gaunt jumped to his feet and followed the members of his court in a stampede for the door.

"It's a cloud of dust," the guard announced, "and a rider lopin' up at the end of the street."

"Don't get all het up for nothin', men!" the judge ordered.

"How do we know it ain't one of the Gila's gang, chief?"

"I reckon if it's only one of the Gila's gang we're too strong to be worryin'!" Gaunt shouted. "Nevertheless, the court will adjourn for a ree-cess, and maybe this rider comin' into town will offer to ack as the attorney for the Gila."

The newcomer galloped up, and shouts and oaths went up from every throat.

"A woman!" Gaunt cried, choking with amazement. "Damme if it ain't my gal!"

"Jennie Lee! What and the hell!" the men at the doorway echoed.

Tom Drury, who had been crowded away from the window, made the humble remark that it was customary to let the prisoner choose his own attorney.

The men did not hear him. If they had, they would have considered his question nonsensical and irrelevant to the last degree. But Tom waited patiently for the trial to begin, and he waited without any particular qualms.

Serious as his position was, he intuitively felt that at last a ray of hope had come, as it had come to the *Merchant of Venice* when *Portia* arrived to confound the Venetian judges and lawyers with a woman's interpretation of the letter of the law.

CHAPTER XVI.

JENNIE LEE DEALS.

WHEN Jennie Lee had led her three outlaws through the upper end of the gap, the riders followed in single file, each about a furlong apart. The

girl had wound her way through thickets of mesquite and bearbrush, rounding a hill where she came precipitously upon the town from the northern side. Here she waited until the outlaws caught up to her.

She had arranged her advance so that no dust of sufficient quantity to announce the approach was raised by the separated horses. She now ordered the men to hide themselves in a little barranca where the piñon trees and bearbrush would completely shield their mounts from the view of the town.

From the hill where they stood they commanded a good view of the main street. Here Jennie saw the saddle horses which had been snubbed to the watering trough, and beyond them, scarcely fifty feet, the sheriff's office. Loafing near the trough was a stubby little cowman smoking a brown cigarette; on the opposite side of the street a huge gelding, which she immediately recognized as the outlaw buckner, Crater. His quivering muscles were pestered with flies, his head tossing angrily and his forefeet digging a deep groove in the sand.

Jennie was now able to set forth her plan.

The three men were to divide and then hide in the houses adjacent to the courtroom. The two who were nearest the watering trough were to jump the horse guard, loosen the cinches of all the mounts, then creep to the window-sill. All three were to present themselves at either the window or the door and hold the gang up.

"One of the horses is a big black gelding which belongs to the Gila," she explained. "Be sure not to meddle with the saddle of that horse. And also be sure to save three horses for yourselves, so you can ride out of town—"

"It's too risky," Slinkey Driggs objected. "Three men can't hold up a armed posse. They'd spit out lead at us like we was cuspidors in a hotel lobby."

"It's not only you three men," the girl persuaded. "I am going to be on the inside. I will give the Gila a gun. What can they do when the Gila himself is on the inside, and three men—for all they know, thirty men—on the outside holding them up?"

"What I wants to know," the giant negro put in, "is just how we're goin' to get the reward for this here game. Looks to me like you-all bein' our leader—and a lady at that—will get everythin', and we won't get nothin'."

"I am looking for no reward except the life of the man we are saving," she said.

"The Gila will do what's right by us," the half-breed Mexican affirmed. "Always he does what's right by his henchmen. And this trick which is to save his life—hell! The sky itself is no limit to what he'll do for us. I'll be goin' to bullfights in Mexico City the rest of my days."

"I'm thinkin' before the night's over we'll all three of us be swingin' to the gentle zephyrs that blows down by Diablo!" was Slinkey Driggs's comment. "That's the reward I'm expectin'!"

"Hell, get up your nerve!" the Mexican sneered. "We got nothing to do but to lay low. Not a shot to fire! Will you look at this *señorita* going right into the courtroom itself! That's what takes nerve!"

"Your part in the game won't be dangerous," she explained. "The only ticklish place will be fighting the horse guard. Even that will be a fight of two of you against one—and that one will be taken unawares."

"But the Vigilantes," Slinkey objected, "after we get through sticking 'em up? We can't hold our guns on 'em all day!"

"As soon as their prisoner has escaped," argued Jennie, "you will escape, too. Jump on any of the saddle horses you pick out for yourselves. Then the posse will follow, mount the nags that are left and find their saddles slipping around underneath the horses' feet. It won't be any kind of a fight. Everything's on our side, including the Gila himself!"

This word seemed to reassure them. "Yes, the Gila's with us! It don't matter much who's ag'in' us if he's with us!"

The vision of a fabulous reward, the sort of reward they knew the Gila could easily give them, finally persuaded the three outlaws to follow her in her daring attack.

"Then there's no time to lose," she said. "Take a look at your six-guns, get your horses and follow me single file. And be

sure to hug the side of the mountains as we enter the town. Walk your horses and avoid the trail where the dust is too dry and thick."

She led them down toward the main street.

"I myself will give the cue for you men to stick your heads in at the window and door of the office," she said. "And the cue is going to be a very definite one. After I slip the Gila his gun I'm going to ask one of the men to come out and take a look at my horse. I'll say that my horse has the heaves or that it's coughing. There will be two reasons for my taking this method to give you the signal: it will make one less man in the court room for you to handle, and as the man I intend asking to look at my horse will be old Peter Gaunt, the leader of the Vigilantes, it will make it all the easier for you to surprise the crowd—because you'll be surprising them when they are without their leader."

"But how do you reckon you can get the old man out?" one of the outlaws asked. "Looks to me like you'd have to have a pretty good stand-in with the old gent to get him to look at a hoss when he's figurin' on staging a hanging."

"I think I can manage him!" she said, mounting her horse. "Remember the signal. I am to come out behind the office with Peter Gaunt. That gets him out of the fight. Then you start in the hold-up. There won't be any necessity for shooting. It's a clean hold-up. The Gila jumps through the window, gets to his horse; you follow. If you do any outright murdering in this hold-up, like as not the whole country will be up against you and you'll all hang. Bluff is the word."

The girl was satisfied that she had arranged the fight so that her lover would escape and at the same time her grandfather, who was her lover's captor, would be saved from any possible injury. With this assurance she wheeled her horse and loped into town.

It was just at this time that the trial of Tom Drury had been interrupted by the discovery of Jennie Lee riding alone into Desolation.

The three outlaws accordingly skirted the

outer sheds of the town, keeping themselves constantly out of sight of the main street and darting from behind one shack to the protection of another. When they were behind the old house which Jennie had pointed out to them as the court room, the bandits got to their hands and knees and crawled into the adjacent house, a dance hall. Here, as they tiptoed bit by bit across the rotten floor, they could hear the sound of voices coming to them from the sheriff's office next door. Windows at the further end of the dance hall looked directly upon the main street, where the champing of the saddle horses was distinctly audible. Creeping ahead as far as they dared toward the front of the shack, they paused in the seclusion of a dark stall, which had once been a booth in the dance hall. From here they could command a good view of the street. The saddle horses were plain to be seen at the watering trough, switching at flies, pawing at the alkali or nodding sleepily as they waited. On the other side of the street was the big black gelding which the girl had warned them to leave unmolested.

"When you've got the guard out of the way," Slinkey Drigges whispered to his men, "untether that horse. The Gila will jump for it, and like as not he won't have no time to be messin' around with the halter rope."

In the middle of the road was the stumpy, bow-legged cowman smoking a cigarette and contemplating the beauty of the mountain peaks.

"Jump for him and tie this here zarape round his face so's he can't holler," Drigges said.

"For the sake of our own hides," the negro rejoined, "I'm thinkin' we'll wait until we have a good chance before messin' in with that thar cowboy. He'll saunter over here after a spell and then we can jump him."

"Take your time," Drigges cautioned. "One thing you got now is plenty of time. The gal's just comin' into town. Even if we waited till they was just about to come out into the street for to proceed with the hanging, it wouldn't be too late for us. Don't under no conditions start the game until some time after the gal's gone into the

court room. When you see her go in—then wait a while, watch your chance, and swish! with the ole zarape round that bird's head!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEFENSE.

WHEN Peter Gaunt had overcome his first shock of amazement at seeing his granddaughter appear unaccompanied in the heart of the mountains, he blurted out a volley of questions: "How did you get here? Who showed you the way? Why is it your horse is not lathered and exhausted from the long ride?" and finally, "Why in tarnation did you come, anyway?"

"I came to save an innocent man from lynching!" she answered coolly.

"Innocent! We got the Gila who's been murderin' every one as has crossed his path for the last ten years! We got the man who has drove us out'n our house and home—and disgraced me, who's supposed to keep the range clean of bandits! And now what do you think you're goin' to do coming here at the last minute!"

"Clout Gomery told me you were going to give the man a chance and try him."

"We was goin' to try him. I started a regular court like the ones they had in my dad's day. 'Try 'em and hang 'em before the court adjourns!' That was the old slogan in those days and in this very town! We started a trial here, but there ain't no one will ack as the attorney for the defense. The Gila hasn't got a argyment in the world that 'll save him."

"There's one argument," she answered. "And if no one has offered so far to present that argument and act as attorney, I will offer to do it myself."

"We ain't goin' to allow no women folk in this investigation. It's a time for the Vigilantes and lynching—not for little gals."

"At least, I can go in and talk to your prisoner," she begged.

"Talkin' ain't goin' to buy you or him nothin'!"

"But I'm going to see the trial."

After the chief found that to argue was merely to delay the proceedings, he con-

sented to let his granddaughter come in with him.

"First, I want to snub my horse behind the shack," she said. "It looks to me as if he's suffering from heat-stroke and I want to keep him in the shade."

The chief went in, and after the men had resumed their places, Jennie entered.

When the girl and Tom Drury met the members of the posse realized that a serious complication had insinuated itself into the lynching party. The prisoner had a strong ally in the person of the granddaughter of their chief. Some of the men were eager to do without any further argumentation. The Gila should hang before any added and perhaps more serious interruption. But Gaunt was determined to carry out a formal investigation as he had promised Drury, despite the fact that a new crime could be checked up against the Gila's name: the villain had actually worked upon the sympathies of Jennie Lee.

Jennie took Tom's hand, and across her face there passed a flitting shadow of despair, then gentleness, but without a single suggestion of doubt:

"You're goin' to be free, remember that," she said. "I don't care what they've trumped up about you, you will not hang."

"They've got what looks like conclusive proof, girl," Tom replied. "This man calling himself Henry Sugg posed as a guide and took me into the desert. He rustled my horse, my gun, my sombrero, and left me on the mesa to die of sunstroke, or thirst, or at the hand of his outlaws."

"That's the story we're goin' to investigate," Gaunt interrupted. He did not relish the fact that his prisoner and his granddaughter seemed inclined to delay the proceedings with a heart-to-heart talk. "And it's the all-fired comicaest story I ever did hear from a bandit who knows he's cornered! If you ain't got anything better than that to offer, this here trial is going to be a joke."

"I've got something better to offer," said Jennie.

"It's customary in most courts for the prisoner to choose his own attorney," Drury put in. "If it's all the same to you, I'd like to appoint as my counsel this girl."

Gaunt replied with oaths and violent choking. But some of his posse were too impatient to argue such an inconsequential matter.

"Let him have the lady as his counsel, chief!" Lingo offered placatingly. "Anything to get this trial over with."

"I'm thanking you, Mr. Lingo," Tom remarked.

The "judge" finally gave his consent to what appeared to him a most ridiculous breaking of precedent. Women lawyers were unknown on the range. The most exalted position that any member of the sex had ever attained was the schoolmistress down at Donkey Creek. The ladies at Cattloe had never risen beyond the estate of waitresses.

"Since there ain't no one else will take his case for him," the judge finally consented, "we'll let the gal be one—nominally as you might say—just so it 'll never be said that old Peter Gaunt didn't do what was fair by a man who's down and out."

He opened the proceedings by banging his crop on the rotten table which had been set up as the "bench."

"The prisoner will set down on that thar roulette table in the middle of the room," he decreed. "And don't forget to stand up after the jury's pronounced you guilty, so's I can pass a bona fide judgment on ye."

Marty Lingo, acting the part of the prosecuting attorney, sat on what had once been a rain barrel, placed on the other side of the room, and the prisoner's counsel was given a seat on a box next to the gaming table.

"The rest of you hombres will set up thar on the bar, which we'll call you the jury, bein' there's about twelve of you. Listen plumb careful to all the argyments, then Blowfly thar, who'll be your foreman, will git up at the end of the trial and say, 'Your honor, we find this here prisoner guilty of murder in the first degree.'"

"I'll remember them words, chief," the foreman sang out.

"Bein' as we ain't got a Bible and there ain't no one here that's ever seen one, the jury will not be sworn in."

The gang of Vigilantes and ranchmen

who had been designated as the jury accordingly sat in a row upon the old bar. At one end was Blowfly Jones, the "foreman," fat, red-faced, stupid. At the other end near a door was Henry Sugg.

The feelings of Henry Sugg, as he took his place on the jury which was to decide whether or not the prisoner was guilty, must have been intense to an extraordinary degree. He found himself suddenly in a position to judge the man who was bearing his, Sugg's, own guilt.

The momentary and defiant exchange of glances between Sugg and the girl was none the less dramatic.

Sugg's expression, amused, smiling, sarcastic, seemed to say: "Here is your lover; what do you think of the heroic Tom Drury now?" Her glance seemed to answer: "You are the man, Henry Sugg, who should be in Drury's place!"

She banished Sugg's smile from her consciousness and looked around the mock courtroom. She had suddenly found herself in a situation with several vital possibilities. It was like a game, as Marty expressed it later, in which she held absolutely the highest card in every suit. In the first place, she had a power over her old grandfather which she used to its utmost limit. It was not the only winning card, but it was the safest to play. And she resolved to lead off with it.

Then, again, her absolute faith in the prisoner had given him new hope and a great desire to fight, and the loaded six-gun she was about to hand him completed this combination. It alone might have started a fight disastrous to the group of unsuspecting men perched on the bar. Her last card—and the one she resolved to play only in case of the direct extremity—was the carefully planned attack from without. Despite the strength of her hand, Jennie had a game to play which was more complex than any one in that courtroom understood.

Her ultimate purpose was to free her lover, something which, considering her power, might have been simple and sure enough. But complicating this purpose was the determination that there should be no shooting while her grandfather was in the

room. During the entire argument that followed, and the mock trial, the ridiculous travesty of justice which was the result of Gaunt's promise to Tom Drury, Jennie was perplexed by this ever-present conflict: to save her lover, on the one hand; to keep her grandfather out of danger, on the other.

Her most ardent hope, therefore, was to win over the determined, bigoted "jury" of Vigilantes who were eager for a quick hanging. If she could do this her next step would have been simple enough: she would turn the tables on the three bandits whom she had posted outside the courtroom, tell the Vigilantes of their presence, and have them captured and bound without any further ado.

But this ideal outcome to the situation, she realized, was too much to hope for. As the argument—ridiculous, one-sided—wore on, the hope of acquitting Tom Drury in the eyes of the Vigilantes vanished completely.

"The first step in a trial of this sort," the judge began, "will be a argyment by the prosecution settin' forth in plain cow-country man-talk just how and wherefore this here bird is guilty. Bein' as Marty Lingo is the prosecution, we'll listen to his idees on the subject of lynchin' this bird."

"Well, chief," Marty began, "I ain't much on makin' speeches, but as I said before, when you brought this here prisoner to my ranch, we'd orter 'low him some sort of investigation. That's why I agreed to your idea, chief, bein' that we all knows you're a just man and all that. Well, he seen what he done to my place. Some of my horses was rustled away like as if a gap opened up in the ground and swallowed them, like it did the bears in the Old Testament—"

"No legalities! Marty! No legalities!" some of the cowmen objected.

"And we showed this here gent the horse which it is well known he busted just a couple days before, out there in Cattleoe, before the whole town. You yourself seen that, judge. It was your own hoss, and when you say that thar hoss snubbed acrost the street is your'n there ain't no use this bird denyin' it."

"That's a good point, Marty!" a gentleman seated on the old mahogany bar avouched.

"Further and more, gents, I'd like for the prisoner to explain just how he happened to be up on the mesa on foot, while his hoss was down to my outfit gallavantin' and snortin' around without its rider?"

"Yes, let him explain that!" said a jurymen. "Damned if I'll vote him innocent if he can't explain that!"

Marty cleared his throat and began to warm up to his oration.

"Now, gents, the rest of the facts goes clear ag'in' him. The chief here and all of you Vigilantes was told as how my place got shot up, and you come ridin' out for to get him."

"What you said, Marty," the chief interposed, "is straight, and the whole jury, bein' they was with us when this happened, will agree to it and swear to it as bein' the truth."

Marty Lingo spat in his big red fist and rubbed his palms together preparatory to another speech.

"Now, the rest of the facts, gents, is well bekknown to all of you. You find this bird asleep on the mesa; then you take him back to my ranch. You-all axed what the trouble was; and I said, 'Trouble enough,' as you-all remember, and I told as how the Gila had come there with his henchmen and got my money, which he spirited away to the mountains like in the Old Testament Moses was took up into Mount Sinai."

"Which ain't got nothin' to do with the case!" a jurymen commented disgustedly.

The judge pounded on his table with his crop, restoring order, but setting himself coughing with the dust he had beaten up.

"And durin' the raid," Marty Lingo went on, "the hell bender lost his hat—which we have here and which I am happy to show the jury as Exhibit B."

"Is the prosecution through with his case?" the judge asked, "or do you want to bring up some more witnesses and some more exhibits?"

"It appears we got exhibits enough," Marty replied. "And as for witnesses, I'll say that I'm the main witness myself. If you-all want to hear how many head of

steer I had in my beef herd, and which of my ranch hands I had wounded in the gun fight this hell bender pulled off, I'll be glad to tell ye."

"I reckon it ain't necessary, and besides we ain't got time," the judge replied. "The prisoner's got to hang pronto. Like as not some of his gang will be around hankerin' for a fight if we don't finish him before noon."

"I'm through with my part of the case, chief," Marty Lingo announced.

"Does the dee-fense want to do any cross-questioning?" the judge asked, turning to Tom Drury.

Drury, with an expression which the court thought a stoical calmness, turned to his "counsel," Jennie Lee. During the speeches of the prosecution she and Tom had exchanged several bits of conversation. In one of these Tom was given to understand that in the web-covered space in the side of the table which had once served as a drawer there was a six-gun loaded in every chamber.

Tom was also instructed by her to wait until she took her grandfather out of the room before he started anything. If he waited until then he would have help.

"You've told your side of the story," the girl announced, "and instead of questioning you about it, which we all believe and some of you know to be the truth, I am going to tell you Tom Drury's side. The gist of what I'm going to tell you is this: the Gila is a man who has kept his identity secret ever since he came on the range and who succeeds in all of his tricks because of that carefully guarded secret.

"Now, just because the Gila has never been seen, folks all around the country think he must keep himself in hiding somewhere or else go about in the dead of night. Did it ever occur to any of you that the Gila has been seen, perhaps by everybody in the county, perhaps by everybody right in the city of Cattleoe itself?"

"No, it never did, if you want my candid opinion, gal," the judge remarked. "And remember this: when a lawyer gets up start-in' to argify his case, he ain't supposed to go browsin' off in some corral in Mexico instead of sticking to the point!"

"Let her get to her story, judge," a jurymen pleaded.

"The Gila's power comes in the fact that he leads a double life," she went on. "He commits a crime and gets a posse hunting for him off in the mountain, while he probably goes to Cattleoe and establishes an alibi for himself by playing pool with some one in town. That's only a guess on my part. But it fits in with what really did happen. The Gila was in Cattleoe when Tom Drury broke our outlaw, Crater."

"We'll agree to that, gal," the judge said. "But I don't see how that's goin' to help the hell bender."

"The Gila was in Cattleoe," the girl hurried on excitedly. "And he was well known. Tom Drury was in Cattleoe, but he was a stranger from Texas. Because he is a stranger, he's guilty; because the Gila was not a stranger, he's innocent! That's the kind of thing you Vigilantes call justice.

"The man who committed those crimes was clever enough to get a double whom nobody knew. And that man was the Gila—not Tom Drury, here, but Tom Drury's guide. He was the man who held him up on the mesa, took his gun, his horse, and the sombrero which he knew every one would recognize. And that man is in this courtroom now. It is Henry Sugg, sitting there on the jury about to condemn his own victim!"

"You mean that I was his guide?" Sugg laughed. "You call me the Gila?"

"I do!"

"And that's the only defense this here crook can offer?" Gaunt asked, joining in Sugg's amused chuckle.

"It is enough!"

"He is the Gila!" Drury cried desperately. "The girl is right! He was my guide!"

This speech was received by uproarious laughter on the part of the judge, the prosecution, and the men perched on the mahogany bar.

"But you didn't have no guide when you left Cattleoe!" one of the Vigilantes pointed out. "You was seen riding out of Cattleoe toward Donkey Bluffs alone."

"I did have a guide. I—"

"Well, if you want to stick to that story, Mr. Gila," the judge remarked, "you can stick to it. But for tarnation sake, accuse some one else besides Henry Sugg. We all know Sugg. Your story that a guide pulled off all this is nonsense on the face of it; but when you cap it all by saying one of the best Vigilantes we got was the guide, you jest get us all shaking our sides in breathless laffing! You're a joke! You're crazy! And if you tell us any more anecdotes like that I'll be laffing so hard that I'll have a attack! Damned if you won't have us all out on the floor rollin' in fits!"

Jennie realized that the Vigilantes were determined to go on with the hanging, and, despite the fact that she knew she held the whole situation in the palm of her hand, one way of solving the situation was denied her: the Vigilantes were in no frame of mind to believe that the evidence which so conclusively pointed to Tom Drury's guilt was all a frame-up by some unknown, legendary trickster who was supposed to have acted as a guide.

And when Tom insisted that that trickster was the highly respected Henry Sugg, Jennie admitted to herself that the case was hopeless. Meanwhile she noticed the coolness of Tom's manner—a coolness bred in a fighter who knows a battle is about to begin. She knew that he cared nothing now for the outcome of the trial itself; he was taking the proceedings as a playful charade which was laughably insignificant in comparison with the imminent and vital thing that was soon to commence.

Jennie was still eager to bring the Vigilantes over to her side, hopeless as the task was. But she saw how indomitably they stuck to their original conviction, and how futile it would be to show them that the Gila had purposely arranged that Tom Drury should ride out of Cattleoe alone—in short, how hopeless it was to explain a dozen damning indications of Tom's guilt. Finally she gave the fight up, and played her other hand.

She estimated that the three outlaws who were skulking outside had had plenty of time now to gag and bind the stockman who had been guarding the horses. She

realized that they had been successful. No sound of the tussle had come to her, and probably even now they were sneaking around by the saddle horses, untying their cinches as she had directed. A few moments more and they would be near the window.

When Drury stood up before her as her "witness," playing the game like an actor in a comedy, caring nothing whether the jury acquitted him or not, she knew that her only move from then on was to kill time.

"Just why did you come into the desert?" she asked in a change of voice which caught the attention of every man in the room.

"I came into the desert to get the Gila who had been terrorizing the country under the very nose of the Vigilantes, who had actually driven the chief of the Vigilantes from his own ranch and had frightened away a girl from the home she had loved all her life."

"Now look here, you fourflusher!" Gaunt stood up, shaking his trembling fist. "That's the way you fooled us at first, snortin' and buzzin' around like you was a hero helpin' some one in distress. But you got caught and they's no use your pullin' the same stuff here with the noose around your neck!"

"Then, if you were freed, what would you do?" the girl asked, without heeding her grandfather's interruption.

"I'd go and see that the ranch the girl was longing for was opened up again, the fountains set to playing, the servants set to baking feasts, and the mandolins and guitars to singing."

"But with the Gila still running free?"

"I'd get the Gila and his gang, and I'd get the money of this prosecuting attorney back again so that his wife wouldn't be weeping her eyes out!"

"Them are big vows," the judge scoffed. "You made one vow in Cattleoe that you'd come out'n here and clear the range of its bandits. I reckon you'll clear it all righto by doin' a tight-rope ack yourself!"

"What this man says he will do, I honestly believe he will do," cried Jennie. "If you free him now and let him go out, he

will right these wrongs that have been done to us and to Marty Lingo and—and to our name.”

The judge fanned the air irascibly.

“Marty, get things goin’ agin. Is there any cross-questionin’ of this here witness?”

“I don’t reckon it’s necessary, judge,” Marty Lingo replied. “Though there is one question I been hankerin’ for to ax him ever since I been appointed prosecutin’ attorney, and that is, just what in hell has he done with that thar money of mine?”

“I don’t know,” Tom Drury answered. “But what I said about righting the wrongs that were done in my name, I mean. And I’m thinking I’ll get a chance.”

“Are you thinkin’ the jury will give you a chance to ride the range again?” the judge asked belligerently.

“I reckon so,” said Tom.

“All right, you gents on the jury,” the judge said. “Bein’ as how I promised this bird a regular investigation, and on top of that I’ve even give him a trial by jury, I reckon I’ll leave you bullwhackers give us a verdict. The prisoner has had a honest-to-God trial with a prosecutin’ attorney and a dee-fense, both givin’ speeches, and cross-questions. The next step and the final one before the hanging will be to have the jury pronounce him guilty. Now I appointed Blowfly thar as your foreman. You gents can tell him what your ideas are about this here case. Don’t waste too much time argufyin’—less you want to figure whether we’d order hang the prisoner in town or up on Mount Diablo.”

Blowfly scratched his head a moment and then asked shamefacedly:

“What was them words you told me to say at the beginning of the trial, chief? Damned if I ain’t forgot just how you wanted it put.”

“Murder in the first degree,” the judge snapped out. “And you can recommend hangin’.”

“Wait a minute, Blowfly,” Marty Lingo said suddenly.

Every one turned to look at the little bald-headed rancher. The rays of the sun slanted in through the web-covered window and showed a curious expression in the narrow-set, brown, little eyes.

Marty was staring at the girl, and his expression was one of revelation and fear.

“Men, there’s a game been goin’ on here durin’ the trial that we’ve been blind to.”

Jennie’s face paled, but Tom Drury, eager to accentuate his coolness, raised his bound hands to his face and lit a cigarette.

The jurymen on the mahogany bar were for a moment too puzzled to move or speak. Gaunt himself stared at Marty Lingo questioningly, then sensing the possibility that they were all about to be trapped, jumped to his feet.

“When that gal come to town I noticed something, but I didn’t see as how it was important till now. She rode all the way from Cattleoe to save this here bird, and it appears to me she’d order been ridin’ fast.”

“Like as not she was, Marty. What you drivin’ at?”

“When she come ridin’ in, she come in after stickin’ around on the outside of the town, probably postin’ some bandits.”

“Where do you get that?” the judge cried.

“Her horse had come in after a good long rest. It warn’t even lathered. It appears to me as I said: she’d of been ridin’ pretty hard all the way from Cattleoe to save this crook. But she hadn’t been ridin’ enough to get her horse lathered up!”

“The horse was heat-struck!” said Jennie quickly, trying to modulate the trembling voice. “It wouldn’t get wet, no matter how hard I rode; I knew I was killing the horse— I—grandpa, come out!” she blurted excitedly. “Look at the horse— I—” She rushed to her grandfather, clutching at his arm as Marty’s voice drowned her words.

Sugg saw all these things, and in the confusion a light came to him which was slowly revealing the actual situation to every man in that room. Unobserved, Sugg slid down from his seat on the bar and edged his way toward the door. His fingers gravitated slowly toward his holster, but before he could draw he caught Drury’s eye.

Drury’s hands were underneath the table and Sugg knew that it was too late to draw.

While Sugg was estimating just how much of a chance he would have in this

imminent duel, Marty Lingo's voice was rasping out above the confusion:

"And I seen you, while you was talkin' to that thar prisoner. You was holdin' your hand under that gamin' table. Take a look at that table, men! Like as not she's cut his thongs off'n his hands and he's heeled!"

"Jump to your guns, men!" Gaunt yelled, "and out to the street to take a look at your ponies. Damned 'f the place mightn't be surrounded by outlaws."

Marty leaped over an intervening chair, rushed to the prisoner's table, and, catching sight of Drury's face, hesitated the fraction of a second. He felt that he was a little kitten and Drury a huge dog guarding a bone in his kennel. Overcoming this momentary qualm which blanched his face, Marty dived for the table.

Drury caught him under the chin with his fist, whisking out the six-gun with his other hand.

Every man snapped to his holster.

Henry Sugg ducked madly through the

door. A shot from Drury's gun splintered the door-sashing at his right shoulder.

What happened to Sugg was not apparent to any one in the court-room. The negro bandit, who was just about to present himself at the door, caught Sugg with a blow on the mouth that sent him crashing to the wall of the court house, where he dropped and lay still.

The next instant the negro entered. The sombreros of Slinkey Driggs and the Mexican popped up over the sill of the window.

Drury knew that the chance for his escape had come, and he must take the chance now. He looked around at the Vigilantes, who had—every man of them—obeyed a peremptory snarl from the street to hold up hands.

Jennie rushed to the protection of her grandfather, who was standing with up-raised hands, staring dumfounded at the unshaved faces, the stained broken teeth and revelatory smiles of Slinkey, Andres and the negro.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Mr. Barker and Promotion by Douglas Grahame

ALL morning long Mr. Barker, chief assistant to the head of the filing department in the vast general offices of the mighty Luna Silverware Manufacturing Company, had gone about his inconspicuous duties with an air of subdued knowledge of enlarged importance. Had

the scores and scores of other employees of the colossal establishment had the time, or been interested, they would have noted that while this change in Mr. Barker's manner had existed for the past several days it had made itself more evident during the morning in question. So Mr. Barker—he didn't

seem to have a first name—alone was aware of it as he alone was conscious that his miniature mustache was the smartest and best groomed of any in the extensive establishment.

Mr. Barker was naturally a reticent, almost a meek, young man and during the two years of his service with the company he had worked diligently, conscientiously, so much so that Mr. Meers, the department head, had selected him from the half dozen others to be his assistant. That was all very well, and Mr. Barker had been both grateful and flattered; but he was ambitious and had long had his innocent sky-blue eyes on nothing less than Mr. Meers's own place. He had served the firm well, early in the morning and late in the evening, and because of this extraordinary and intelligent diligence he had really brought the department to its present high state of efficiency.

It was he who had thought of arranging letters and documents in a more precise alphabetical order. Prior to his revolution of the method papers had been put away, A's under A and B's under B and let it go at that. Mr. Barker's masterly stroke had been to arrange the files so that Archibald was put before Arnold, and should one of these gentlemen be christened Alec and the other Arthur, the correspondence and papers appertaining to Alec would be arranged before those of Arthur. This was followed through all the letters and the result was the saving of one minute, sometimes two, whenever the files were consulted. No direct notice was taken of this bit of efficiency, but six months later Mr. Barker had been promoted and his pay raised two dollars a week.

The day that our tale has to do with was the second anniversary of Mr. Barker's entering the service of the firm, and that explained why he was dressed in his ready-made best, but was not entirely the reason for his odd air of subdued buoyancy. For almost a week now he had had a notion, almost amounting to a premonition, that grew stronger as his anniversary approached, that his service would be conspicuously acknowledged and fittingly rewarded. This notion, more or less clearly defined, was to the effect that he would

be summoned into the private office of Mr. Spooner, the big boss himself, and there clapped on the shoulder and told by the great man what a valuable asset he was, not only to the Luna Silverware Manufacturing Company but also to his country.

Of course, it was a very bold notion; but plump little young men in thin little jobs are given to such flights of fancy. In even more concrete form, as he had haltingly hinted to Lucy in the parlor of her parents' suburban flat the previous evening, this notion had a great deal to do with the removal of Mr. Meers and the installation of Mr. Barker as the filing department chief. Lucy was a pretty, quiet little violet of a girl, who was one of the lesser members of the auditing department, which was about six offices up the corridor from the department of filing.

The romance had had its inception at the water-cooler and had wended a quiet way with calls twice a week, the movies on Saturday night and a nice little stroll on Sunday afternoon. It is as well to state that Mr. Barker had definitely decided upon matrimony with Miss Lucy as soon as he commanded the princely income of thirty-five dollars a week, which was ten dollars more than his stipend at present. This sum was within a few dollars of what Mr. Meers commanded, but Mr. Barker would be well content with this figure for a while at least, although it was his private dream that some day he would receive fifty dollars each week for his efficient services. This would enable him and his to live sumptuously in their quite little inland city.

On the morning in question when he had arrived a full ten minutes ahead of time, Mr. Barker had more than half expected to find a communication from the big boss complimenting him on his splendid service and informing him that he had been promoted; but nothing of the sort awaited him. But he was not very down-hearted; perhaps Mr. Spooner would stop in to see him on his occasional rounds of the office, not that he had ever done this, for during the time he had been in the service of the company Mr. Barker had only seen the chief in the distance. The exception had been when the great man had paused for a few

moments by the desk of a fashionably garbed and showily attractive young lady, Miss Sparker by name, who was one of the beauties of the secretarial department, diagonally across the corridor from the filing section.

The morning wore on and brought neither message nor personal call; but hope was a thing that died hard in the bosom of Mr. Barker. He had noticed that the slip of a girl who usually delivered letters, papers, and memoranda to the various departments had been replaced by a new messenger, who did not appear to be the brightest bit of femininity in the world. So, Mr. Barker nursed the almost hopeless hope that a message might possibly be delayed for this reason. And it was beneath his dignity to make inquiry.

Lunch time came without incident or variation of routine, and with a slight frown of pique on his smooth brows, Mr. Barker went forth to his modest snack in a still more modest dairy lunch. He could not help hurrying back, and with ill-concealed anxiety looked about his desk, on the tables and everywhere in the department where a memorandum could possibly be deposited, but it was a vain search, and with a pronounced attack of the sulks Mr. Barker applied himself to his work.

A little later on, however, feeling a bit dry, he went to the water-cooler, and while there favored Lucy with a calflike glance and an amorous grin, which she acknowledged with a suppressed giggle. Much happier he returned to his desk and—his heart jumped up in his mouth, for there lay a slip of paper with writing on it. With trembling hands he picked it up and looked at it with eyes that were misty. Sure enough! Just as he had expected! It was like a dream that had come true! "Mr. Spooner wants to see you," was all it said, but that was quite enough.

It was several minutes before Mr. Barker could so far collect himself to make an inspection in a mirror that hung back of a cabinet, pull at his coat and perform those numerous little things that we think put us in order to enter the presence of the great. He walked down one corridor, up another and along a third as though the floor was

a cloud and he a lordly song bird. Out of the corner of his eyes he noticed that Miss Sparker was examining her doll-like face in a tiny mirror which she held in her opened purse and seemed to be titivating, too. But his own affairs concerned him most.

With thumping heart and unsteady mien he paused before the door of the big boss's own private office, and like a rookie charging under his first fire, he half closed his eyes, turned the knob and boldly entered.

Then Mr. Barker opened his eyes, so to speak, and peered at the large and foreboding desk that he felt must be about the middle of the room. He put on his most confident air, which was not saying a great deal, and looked ahead of him; then he gave an involuntary sigh of relief. The office was empty except for himself; Mr. Spooner was not there, but his hat and overcoat on a clothes tree pointed to the possibility that he had merely stepped out of the place for a few moments. Under his neat little mustaché, Mr. Barker smiled at his good fortune; Mr. Spooner's absence gave him the chance to pull himself together.

He stood erect, like a soldier on parade. But in a short while he relaxed, folded his arms, left one leg bend out by the knee; it had occurred to him that he had read or heard somewhere that an employee should be quite at ease when in the presence of his employer.

There was a very comfortable-looking chair right beside the big desk, a chair that appeared as though it would lend dignity to any one who sat in it. Mr. Barker sat down and reclined in a position of poised ease. The moments sped on and Mr. Barker's eyes casually, quite casually let it be stated, ran over the great man's desk, but not so indifferently that he did not see and much appreciate an open box of choice-looking cigars.

At last the door of the sanctum was opened with assurance, and revealed Mr. Spooner. There was a twinkle of anticipation in the great man's eyes as he came in, but this passed when he saw Mr. Barker, and gave place to an expression of puzzled surprise, but not of anger, as the now inwardly quaking visitor was glad to notice. Mr. Spooner closed the door, smiled, and

nodded courteously to Mr. Barker, and came up and took his place at the desk.

His subtle gray eyes were fixed on the visitor in polite scrutiny, and this so disconcerted the uncomfortable young man that he couldn't speak. The boss passed him the box of cigars, and in automatic terror Mr. Barker took and lit one. Somehow the act seemed to steady him.

"A very pleasant afternoon, Mr. Spooner," he remarked in a tone that was brusque because of excessive nervousness. "It looks as though it will be a mild winter."

"Indeed it does," agreed Mr. Spooner in an even and polite tone.

"I trust you have—er—been enjoying the best of health, Mr. Spooner?" was Mr. Barker's next observation. Then, realizing the silliness of the comment, he blushed uncomfortably and fervently wished that the floor would open and afford him a painless exit.

But the inquiry apparently pleased the great man, for he smiled and cleared his throat.

"Excellent, thank you. And I hope you have been quite well?" he answered.

"Oh, yes! There is never anything the matter with me, thank you. I—I—" Embarrassment was too much for the good young man, and he spluttered painfully, but this Mr. Spooner didn't seem to notice.

"Well, it's good to see conditions getting back to normal and the way confidence is being restored, isn't it?" observed the great man.

Mr. Barker was startled by the flattery of the comment, but he was equal to the occasion and replied:

"It certainly is; business is picking up remarkably well, and everything is pointing to a good future."

"Yes; that's what I think too," agreed Mr. Spooner, lighting up a cigar and at the same time taking a discreet look at the desk clock. "Well, sir, and how do you find things in your line? And how can I serve you?" he added in polished, anti-time-wasting tones.

"Oh, we're getting along fine, thank you. We've made a lot of improvements, brought everything up-to-date, you know." Mr. Barker paused because emotion was over-

coming him. Mr. Spooner nodded in interest. Say, this was fine! The big boss was altogether a different person from the one Barker had pictured; nothing gruff about him, a pleasant, democratic courteous gentleman.

"That's splendid. Just what improvements have you brought about, my I ask?"

"Why, we—that is, I—have so arranged the files that whatever is wanted may be obtained without the loss of a moment; everything is arranged in an exact alphabetical order, and—"

But he stopped short, confused, for Mr. Spooner had turned full round in his chair and was looking at him with knitted brows, not angrily but in the fashion of a person who can't quite credit his own hearing powers. But he said nothing, and Mr. Barker, eager to follow up this seeming advantage, resumed his recital of accomplishments.

"Yes, Mr. Spooner, we have made the department one of the most efficient in the organization, and I—"

"The department? What department?" demanded Mr. Spooner sharply but not unkindly.

"Why, the filing department, sir," blurted out the now thoroughly amazed Mr. Barker. "Your—our—filing department."

"Our filing department—of this company?" inquired the puzzled Mr. Spooner, leaning back in his chair and looking at the quavering young man with eyes wide in astonishment.

"Where are you from, and who are you, anyway?" he demanded.

"I'm Mr. Barker, sir—assistant to Mr. Meers, of the filing department," the visitor answered miserably.

"You are?" gasped Mr. Spooner; then he leaned back in his chair and the room rang with hearty laughter, while Mr. Barker looked very scared.

But his employer soon recovered his composure.

"Young man," he said, "I'm grateful to you for the heartiest laugh I've had in many a long year—I thought you were one of our out-of-town customers; they often drop in on us this way—that is, the big ones do. Well, tell me, Mr.—Mr.—how did you come to get in here?"

"Why, you sent for me, Mr. Spooner, so I—"

"I sent for you? Why, I never even knew that you were on this earth before. Don't take that to heart now. Ours is a pretty big organization, and of course I can't know everybody. When and how did I send for you, as you say?"

"This afternoon, sir. I found a note on my desk saying that you wanted to see me, so I came."

"A note? I see; and your name is Barker? I see, I see. It was quite a mistake, but not an unfortunate one, not in the least, I can assure you." He paused thoughtfully, and Mr. Barker, everything a dismal gray about him, hope and everything else crushed, waited for a chance to escape.

"How long have you been with us, Mr. Barker?" the boss asked in kindly tones.

"Two years, sir—two years to-day," Barker replied mechanically.

"Ah, good! Now, Mr. Barker"—briskly—"I don't think we can use you any longer in the filing department; that does not just seem to be your sphere; not cut out for that kind of work, don't you know?" He paused again, while the wretched Barker choked down a big lump of misery that was rising in his throat. Fired! How could he face Lucy? What was life now? His professional pride was mortally injured.

"No, sir—that is certainly not the place for you. It's all right for old man Meers, but not for you. Now, Mr. Barker, I am going to see that you are transferred. Yes, transferred to our salesrooms. I like your make-up, and as you have been here two years and don't seem to be the dullest man in the place, I feel sure that—and, if it's agreeable to you, you may begin your duties there next Monday morning."

In a golden haze Barker remembered a handshake and heard the boss ring for the messenger, muttering something about Miss Sparker.

He had come up the corridor to the boss's office on air; but he went back on wings. The salesrooms! A salesman! That meant thirty-five dollars a week, because not a man down there got less than that! He was very happy, but he was not too deaf to overhear the following bit of conversation uttered in very young feminine voices.

"Say, Mame, you want to watch yourself! Handle that there Miss Sparker with gloves. The boss's been a widower for a year now—is kind of stuck on her, and sends for her to see him for dictation quite often. He ain't had no regular secretary for quite a time, but it looks as if she's goin' to git the job—for keeps. So be careful, kid, and remember her name ain't Mr. Barker, and that she sits over here, and not in there—see?"

NO MAN'S LAND

WHERE the vacuum cleaners mutter—
Ominous and awful sound—
And impedimenta clutter
All the place, each room around—

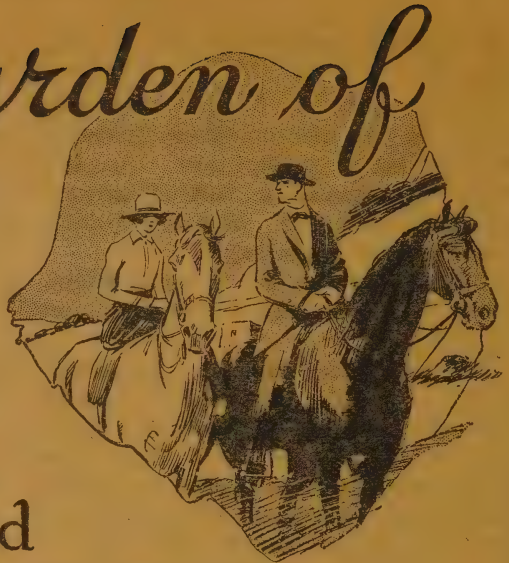
Brooms and dusters, pails of water,
Mops of every size and length,
Weapons making fearful slaughter
Of the housewife's nerves and strength—

Knowing well the circumstances
And the skirmish vain for "eats,"
'Tis a brave man who advances,
But a wiser who retreats!

Mazie V. Caruthers.

The Garden of Eden

Part V
by Max Brand



Author of "The Untamed," "Trailin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WOOING.

BEN CONNOR awoke the next morning with the sun streaming across the room and sprang out of bed at once, worried. For about dawn noises as a rule began around the house and the singing of the old negroes farther down the hill. The Garden of Eden awakened at sunrise, and this silence even when the sun was high alarmed the gambler. He dressed hastily, and opening his door, he saw David walking slowly up and down the patio. At the sight of Connor he raised a warning finger.

"Let us keep a guard upon our voices," he murmured, coming to Connor. "I have ordered my servants to move softly and to keep from the house if they may."

"What's happened?"

"She sleeps, Benjamin." He turned toward her door with a smile that the gambler never forgot. "Let her waken rested."

Connor looked at the sky.

"I've come too late for breakfast, even?"

A glance of mild rebuke was turned upon him.

"Surely, Benjamin, we who are strong will not eat before her who is weak?"

"Are you going to starve yourself because she's sleepy?"

"But I have not felt hunger."

He added in a voice of wonder: "Listen!"

Ruth Manning was singing in her room, and Connor turned away to hide his frown. For he was not by any means sure whether the girl sang from the joy she found in this great adventure or because of David Eden. He was still further troubled when she came out to the breakfast table in the patio. He had expected that she would be more or less confused by the presence of David after his queer talk of the night before, but sleep seemed to have wiped everything from her memory. Her first nod, to be sure, was for the gambler, but her smile was for David of Eden. Connor fell into a reverie which was hardly broken through the meal by the deep voice of David or the laughter of Ruth. Their gayety was a barrier, and he was, subtly, left on the outside. David had proposed to the girl a ride through the Garden, and when he went for the horses the gambler decided to make sure of her position. He was too much disturbed to be diplomatic. He went straight to the point.

"I'm sorry this is such a mess for you; but if you can buck up for a while it won't take long to finish the job."

She looked at him without understanding,

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which was what he least wanted in the world. So he went on: "As a matter of fact, the worst of the job hasn't come. You can do what you want with him right now. But afterward—when you get him out of the valley the hard thing will be to hold him."

"You're angry with poor David. What's he done now?"

"Angry with him? Of course not! I'm a little disgusted, that's all."

"Tell me why in words of one syllable, Ben."

"You're too fine a sort to have understood. And I can't very well explain."

She allowed herself to be puzzled for a moment and then laughed.

"Please don't be mysterious. Tell me frankly."

"Very well. I think you can make David go out of the valley when we go. But once we have him back in a town the trouble will begin. You understand why he's so—fond of you, Ruth?"

"Let's not talk about it."

"Sorry to make you blush. But you see, it isn't because you're so pretty, Ruth, but simply because you're a woman. The first he's ever seen."

All her high coloring departed at once; a pale, sick face looked at Connor.

"Don't say it," murmured the girl. "I thought last night just for a moment—but I couldn't let myself think of it for an instant."

"I understand," said Connor gently. "You took all that highfaluting poetry stuff to be the same thing. But, say, Ruth, I've heard a young buck talk to a young squaw—before he married her. Just about the same line of junk, eh? What makes me sick is that when we get him out in a town he'll lose his head entirely when he sees a room full of girls. We'll simply have to plant a contract on him and—then let him go!"

"Do you think it's only that?" she said again, faintly.

"I leave it to you. Use your reason, and figure it out for yourself. I don't mean that you're in any danger. You know you're not as long as I'm around!"

She thanked him with a wan smile.

"But how can I let him come near me—now?"

"It's a mess. I'm sorry about it. But once the deal goes through I'll make this up to you if it takes me the rest of my life. You believe me?"

"I know you're true blue, Ben! And—I trust you."

He was a little disturbed to find that his pulse was decidedly quickened by that simple speech.

"Besides, I want to thank you for letting me know this. I understand everything about him now!"

In her heart of hearts she was hating David with all her might. For all night long, in her dreams, she had been seeing again the gestures of those strong brown hands, and the flash of his eyes, and hearing the deep tremor of his voice. The newness of this primitive man and his ways and words had been an intoxicant to her; because of his very difference she was a little afraid, and now the warning of Connor chimed in accurately with a premonition of her own. That adulation poured at the feet of Ruth Manning had been a beautiful and marvelous thing; but flung down simply in honor of her sex it became almost an insult. The memory made her shudder. The ideal lover whom she had prefigured in some of her waking dreams had always spoken with ardor—a holy ardor. From this passion of the body she recoiled.

Something of all this Connor read in her face and in her thoughtful silence, and he was profoundly contented. He had at once neutralized all of David's eloquence and fortified his own position. It was both a blow driven home and a counter. Not that he would admit a love for the girl; he had merely progressed as far as jealousy. He told himself that his only interest was in keeping her from an emotion which, once developed, might throw her entirely on the side of David and ruin their joint plans. He had refused to accompany the master of the Garden and the girl on their ride through the valley because, as he told himself, he "couldn't stand seeing another grown man make such an ass of himself" as David did when he was talking with the girl.

He contented himself now with watching her face when David came back to the patio, followed by Glani and the neat-stepping little mare, Tabari. The forced smile with which she met the big man was a personal triumph to the gambler.

"If you can win her under that handicap, David," he said softly to himself, "you deserve her, and everything else you can get."

David helped her into the saddle on Tabari, and himself sprang onto the pad upon Glani's back. They went out side by side.

It was a cool day for that season, and the moment the north wind struck them David shouted softly and sent Glani at a rushing gallop straight into the teeth of the wind. Tabari followed at a pace which Ruth, expert horsewoman though she was, had never dreamed of. For the first time she had that impression of which Ben Connor had spoken to her of the horse pouring itself over the road without strain and without jar of smashing hoofs.

Ruth let Tabari extend herself, until the mare was racing with ears flat against her neck. She had even an impression that Glani, burdened by the great weight of David, was being left behind, but when she glanced to the side she saw that the master half a length back, was keeping a strong pull on the stallion, and Glani went smoothly, easily, with enormous strides, and fretting at the restraint.

She gained two things from that glance. The first was a sense of impatience because the stallion kept up so easily; in the second place, the same wind which drove the long hair of David straight back blew all suspicious thoughts out of her mind. She drew Tabari back to a hand gallop and then to a walk with her eyes dimmed by the wind of the ride and the blood tingling in her cheeks.

"It was like having wings," she cried happily as David let the stallion come up abreast.

"Tabari is sturdy, but she lacks speed," said the dispassionate master. "When she was a foal of six months and was brought to me for judgment, I thought twice, because her legs were short. However, it is

well that she was allowed to live and breed."

"Allowed to live?" murmured Ruth Manning.

"To keep the line of the gray horse perfect," said David, "they must be watched with a jealous eye, and those which are weak must not live. The mares are killed and the stallions gelded and sold."

"And can you judge the little colts?"

Her voice was too low for David to catch a sense of pain and anger in it.

"It must be done. It is a duty. To-day is the sixth month of Timeh, the daughter of Juri. You shall witness the judging. Elijah is the master."

His face hardened at the name of Elijah, and the girl caught her breath. But before she could speak they broke out of a grove and came in view of a wide meadow across which four yoked cattle drew a harrow, smoothing the plow furrows to an even, black surface.

It carried the girl far back; it was like opening an ancient book of still more ancient tales; the musty smell completes the illusion. The cattle plodding slowly on, seeming to rest at every step, filled in the picture of which the primitive David Eden was the central figure.

"Yokes," she cried. "I've never seen them before!"

"For some work we use the horses, but the jerking of the harrow ruins their shoulders. Besides, we may need the cattle for a new journey."

"A journey? With those?"

"That was how the four came into the Garden. And I am enjoined to have the strong wagons always ready and the ox teams always complete in case it becomes necessary to leave this valley and go elsewhere. Of course, that may never be."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAVID SPEAKS OF JEWELS AND SETTINGS.

HE brought Glani to a halt. They had left the sight of the meadow, though they could still hear the snorting of the oxen at their labor, a distant sound. Here, on one side of the road, the forest

tumbled back from a swale of ground across which a tiny stream leaped and flashed with crooked speed, and the ground seemed littered with bright gold, so closely were the yellow wild flowers packed.

"Two days ago," said David, "they were only buds. See them now!"

He slipped from his horse and, stooping, rose again in a moment with his hands full of the yellow blossoms.

"They have a fragrance that makes them seem far away," he said. "See!"

He tossed the flowers at her; the wind caught them and spangled her hair and her clothes with them, and she breathed a rare perfume. David fell to clapping his hands and laughing like a child at the picture she made. She had never liked him so well as she did at this moment. She had never pitied him as she did now; she was not wise enough to shrink from that emotion.

"It was made for you—this place."

And before she could move to defend herself he had raised her strongly, lightly from the saddle, and placed her on the knoll in the thickest of the flowers. He stood back to view his work, nodding his satisfaction, and she, looking up at him, felt the old sense of helplessness sweep over her. Every now and then David Eden overwhelmed her like an inescapable destiny; there was something foredoomed about the valley and about him.

"I knew you would look like this," he was saying. "How do men make a jewel seem more beautiful? They set it in gold! And so with you, Ruth. Your hair against the gold is darker and richer and more like piles and coils of shadow. Your face against the gold is the transparent white, with a bloom in it. Your hands are half lost in the softness of that gold. And to think that is a picture you can never see! But I forget."

His face grew dark.

"Here I have stumbled again, and yet I started with strong vows and resolves. My brother Benjamin warned me!"

It shocked her for a reason she could not analyze to hear the big man call Connor his brother. Connor, the gambler, the schemer! And here was David Eden with the green of the trees behind, his feet in

the golden wild flowers, and the blue sky behind his head. Brother to Ben Connor?

"And how did he warn you?" she asked.

"That I must not talk to you of yourself, because, he said, it shames you. Is that true?"

"I suppose it is," she murmured. Yet she was a little indignant because Connor had presumed to interfere. She knew he could only have done it to save her from embarrassment, but she rebelled at the thought of Connor as her conversational guardian.

Put a guard over David of Eden, and what would he be? Just like a score of callow youths whom she had known, scattering foolish commonplaces, trying to make their dull eyes tell her flattering things which they had not brains enough to put into words.

"I am sorry," said David, sighing. "It is hard to stand here and see you, and not talk of what I see. When the sun rises the birds sing in the trees; when I see you words come up to my teeth."

He made a grimace. "Well, I'll shut them in. Have I been very wrong in my talk to you?"

"Think you haven't talked to many women," said Ruth. "And—most men do not talk as you do."

"Most men are fools," answered the egoist. "What I say to you is the truth, but if the truth offends you I shall talk of other things."

He threw himself on the ground sullenly. "Of what shall I talk?"

"Of nothing, perhaps. Listen!"

For the great quiet of the valley was falling on her, and the distances over which her eyes reached filled her with the delightful sense of silence. There were deep blue mountains piled against the paler sky; down the slope and through the trees the river was untarnished, solid, silver; in the boughs behind her the wind whispered and then stopped to listen likewise. There was a faint ache in her heart at the thought that she had not known such things all her life. She knew then what gave the face of David of Eden its solemnity. She leaned a little toward him. "Now tell me about yourself. What you have done."

"Of anything but that."

"Why not?"

"No more than I want you to tell me about yourself and what you have done. What you feel, what you think from time to time, I wish to know; I am very happy to know. I fit in those bits of you to the picture I have made."

Once more the egoist was talking!

"But to have you tell me of what you have done—that is not pleasant. I do not wish to know that you have talked to other men and smiled on them. I do not wish to know of a single happy day you spent before you came to the Garden of Eden. But I shall tell you of the four men who are my masters if you wish."

"Tell me of them if you will."

"Very well. John was the beginning. He died before I came. Of the others Matthew was my chief friend. He was very old and thin. His wrist was smaller than yours, almost. His hair was a white mist. In the evening there seemed to be a pale moon-shine around his face.

"He was very small and old—so old that sometimes I thought he would dry up or dissolve and disappear. Toward the last, before God called him, Matthew grew weak, and his voice was faint, yet it was never sharp or shaken. Also, until the very end his eyes were young, for his heart was young.

"That was Matthew. He was like you. He liked the silence. 'Listen,' he would say. 'The great stillness is the voice; God is speaking.' Then he would raise one thin finger and we caught our breath and listened.

"Do you see him?"

"I see him, and I wish that I had known him."

"Of the others, Luke was taller than I. He had yellow hair as long and as coarse as the mane of a yellow horse. When he rode around the lake we could hear him coming for a great distance by his singing, for his voice was as strong as the neigh of Glani. I have only to close my eyes, and I can hear that singing of Luke from beside the lake. Ah, he was a huge man! The horses sweated under him.

"His beard was long; it came to the

middle of his belly; it had a great blunt square end. Once I angered him. I crept to him when he slept—I was a small boy then—and I trimmed the beard down to a point.

"When Luke wakened he felt the beard and sat for a long time looking at me. I was so afraid that I grew numb, I remember. Then he went to the Room of Silence. When he came out his anger was gone, but he punished me. He took me to the lake and caught me by the heels and swung me around his head. When he loosened his fingers I shot into the air like a light stone. The water flashed under me, and when I struck the surface seemed solid. I thought it was death, for my senses went out, but Luke waded in and dragged me back to the shore. However, his beard remained pointed till he died."

He chuckled at the memory.

"Paul reproved Luke for what he had done. Paul was a big man, also, but he was short, and his bigness lay in his breadth. He had no hair, and he stood under Luke nodding so that the sun flashed back and forth on his bald head. He told Luke that I might have been killed.

"'Better teach him sober manners now,' said Luke, 'than be a jester to knock at the gate of God.'

"This Paul was wonderfully silent. He was born unhappy and nothing could make him smile. He used to wander through the valley alone in the middle of winter, half dead with cold and eating nothing. In those times, even Luke was not strong enough to make him come home to us.

"I know that for ten days at one time he had gone without speech. For that reason he loved to have Joseph with him, because Joseph understood signs.

"But when silence left him, Paul was great in speech. Luke spoke in a loud voice and Matthew beautifully, but Paul was terrible. He would fall on his knees in an agony and pray to God for salvation for us and for himself. While he kneeled he seemed to grow in size. He filled the room. And his words were like whips. They made me think of all my sins. That is how I remember Paul, kneeling, with his long arms thrown over his head.

"Matthew died in the evening just as the moon rose. He was sitting beside me. He put his hand in mine. After a while I felt that the hand was cold, and when I looked at Matthew his head had fallen.

"Paul died in a drift of snow. We always knew that he had been on his knees praying when the storms struck him and he would not rise until he had finished the prayer.

"Luke bowed his head one day at the table and died without a sound—in spite of all his strength.

"All these men have not really died out of the valley. They are here, like mists; they are faces of thin air. Sometimes when I sit alone at my table, I can almost see a spirit-hand like that of Matthew rise with a shadow-glass of wine.

"But shall I tell you a strange thing? Since you came into the valley, these mist-images of my dead masters grow faint and thinner than ever."

"You will remember me, also, when I have gone?"

"Do not speak of it! But, yes, if you should go, every spring, when these yellow flowers blossom, you would return to me and sit as you are sitting now. However you are young, yet there are ways. After Matthew died, for a long time I kept fresh flowers in his room and kept his memory fresh with them. But," he repeated, "you are young. Do not talk of death!"

"Not of death, but of leaving the Garden."

He stared gravely at him, and flushed.

"You are tormenting me as I used to torment my masters when I was a boy. But it is wrong to anger me. Besides I shall not let you go."

"Not *let* me go?"

"Am I a fool?" he asked hotly. "Why should I let you go?"

"You could not keep me."

It brought him to his feet with a start.

"What will free you?"

"Your own honor, David."

His head fell.

"It is true. Yes, it is true. But let us ride on. I no longer am pleased with this place. It is tarnished; there are unhappy thoughts here!"

"What a child he is!" thought the girl, as she climbed into the saddle again. "A selfish, terrible, wonderful child!"

It seemed, after that, that the purpose of David was to show the beauties of the Garden to her until she could not brook the thought of leaving. He told her what grew in each meadow and what could be reaped from it.

He told her what fish were caught in the river and the lake. He talked of the trees. He swung down from Glani, holding with hand and heel, and picked strange flowers and showed them to her.

"What a place for a house!" she said, when, near the north wall, they passed a hill that overlooked the entire length of the valley.

"I shall build you a house there," said David eagerly. "I shall build it of strong rock. Would that make you happy? Very tall, with great rooms."

An impish desire to mock him came to her.

"Do you know what I'm used to? It's a boarding house where I live in a little back bedroom, and they call us to meals with a bell."

The humor of this situation entirely failed to appeal to him.

"I also," he said, "have a bell. And it shall be used to call you to dinner, if you wish."

He was so grave that she did not dare to laugh. But for some reason that moment of bantering brought the big fellow much closer to her than he had been before. And when she saw him so docile to her wishes, for all his strength and his mastery, the only thing that kept her from opening her heart to him, and despising the game which she and Connor were playing with him, was the warning of the gambler.

"I've heard a young buck talk to a young squaw—before he married her. The same line of junk!"

Connor must be right. He came from the great city.

But before that ride was over she was repeating that warning very much as Odysseus used the flower of Hermes against the arts of Circe. For the Garden of Eden, as they came back to the house after the cir-

cuit, seemed to her very much like a little kingdom, and the monarch thereof was inviting her in dumb-show to be the queen of the realm.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OLD DAYS.

AT the house they were met by one of the negroes who had been waiting for David to receive from the master definite orders concerning some woodchopping. For the trees of the garden were like children to David of Eden, and he allowed only the ones he himself designated to be cut for timber or fuel. He left the girl with manifest reluctance.

"For when I leave you of what do you think, and what do you do? I am like the blind."

She felt that this speech was peculiar in character. Who but David of Eden could have been jealous of the very thoughts of another? And smiling at this, she went into the patio where Ben Connor was still lounging. Few things had ever been more gratifying to the gambler than the sight of the girl's complacent smile, for he knew that she was judging David.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Nothing worth repeating. But I think you're wrong, Ben. He isn't a barbarian. He's just a child."

"That's another word for the same thing. Ever see anything more brutal than a child? The reddest Indian that ever stepped is a saint compared with a ten-year-old boy."

"Perhaps. He acts like ten years. When I mention leaving the valley he flies into a tantrum; he has taken me so much for granted that he has even picked out the site for my house."

"As if you'd ever stay in a place like this!"

He covered his touch of anxiety with loud laughter.

"I don't know," she was saying thoughtfully a moment later. "I like it—a lot."

"Anything seems pretty good after Lukin. But when your auto is buzzing down Broadway—"

She interrupted him with a quick little laugh of excitement.

"But do you really think I can make him leave the valley?"

"Of course I'm sure."

"He says there's a law against it."

"I tell you, Ruth, you're his law now; not whatever piffle is in that Room of Silence."

She looked earnestly at the closed door. Her silence had always bothered the gambler, and this one particularly annoyed him.

"Let's hear your thoughts?" he asked uneasily.

"It's just an idea of mine that inside that room we can find out everything we want to know about David Eden."

"What do we want to know?" growled Connor. "I know everything that's necessary. He's a nut with a gang of the best horses that ever stepped. I'm talking horse, not David Eden. If I have to make the fool rich it isn't because I want to."

She returned no direct answer, but after a moment: "I wish I knew."

"What?"

She became profoundly serious.

"The point is this: he *may* be something more than a boy or a savage. And if he *is* something more, he's the finest man I've ever laid eyes on. That's why I want to get inside that room. That's why I want to learn the secret—if there is a secret—the things he believes in, how he happens to be what he is and how—"

Connor had endured her rising warmth of expression as long as he could. Now he exploded.

"You do me one favor," he cried excitedly, more moved than she had ever seen him before. "Let me do your thinking for you when it comes to other men. You take my word about this David Eden. Bah! When I have you fixed up in little old Manhattan you'll forget about him and his mystery inside a week. Will you lay off on the thinking?"

She nodded absently. In reality she was struck by the first similarity she had ever noticed between David of Eden and Connor the gambler: within ten minutes they had both expressed remarkable concern as to what might be her innermost thoughts.

She began to feel that Connor himself might have elements of the boy in his make up—the cruel boy which he protested was in David Eden.

She had many reasons for liking Connor. For something he had offered her an escape from her old imprisoned life. Again he had flattered her in the most insinuating manner by his complete trust. She knew that there was not one woman in ten thousand to whom he would have confided his great plan, and not one in a million whose ability to execute his scheme he would have trusted.

More than this, before her trip to the Garden he had given her a large sum of money for the purchase of the half-breed's gelding; and Ruth Manning had learned to appreciate money. He had not asked for any receipt. His attitude had been such that she had not even been able to mention that subject.

Yet much as she liked Connor there were many things about him which jarred on her. There was a hardness, always working to the surface like rocks on a hard soil. Worst of all, sometimes she felt a degree of uncleanness about his mind and its working. She would not have recoiled from these things had he been nearer her own age; but in a man well over thirty she felt that these were fixed characteristics.

He was in all respects the antipode of David of Eden. It was easier to be near Connor, but not so exciting. David wore her out, but he also was marvelously stimulating. The dynamic difference was that Connor sometimes inspired her with aversion, and David made her afraid. She was roused out of her brooding by the voice of the gambler saying: "When a woman begins to think a man begins to swear."

She managed to smile, but these cheap little pat quotations which she had found amusing enough at first now began to grate on her through repetition. Just as Connor tagged and labeled his idea with this aphorisms, so she felt that Connor himself was tagged by them. She found him considering her with some anxiety.

"You haven't begun to doubt me, Ruth?" he asked her.

And he put out his hand with a note of

appeal. It was a new rôle for him and she at once disliked it. She shook the hand heartily.

"That's a foolish thing to say," she assured him. "But—why does that old negro keep sneaking around us?"

It was Zacharias, who for some time had been prowling around the patio trying to find something to do which would justify his presence.

"Do you think David Eden keeps him here as a spy on us?"

This was too much for even Connor's suspicious mind, and he chuckled.

"All these black faces want to hang around and have a look at you—that's the point," he answered. "Speak to him and you'll see him come running."

It needed not even speech; she smiled and nodded at Zacharias, and he came to her at once with a grin of pleasure wrinkling his ancient face. She invited him to sit down.

"I never see you resting," she said.

"David dislikes an idler," said Zacharias, who acknowledged her invitation by dropping his withered hands on the back of the chair, but made no move to sit down.

"But after all these years you have worked for him, I should think he would give you a little house of your own, and nothing to do except take care of yourself."

He listened to her happily, but it was evident from his pause that he had not gathered the meaning of her words.

"You come from the South?" he asked at length.

"My father came from Tennessee."

There was an electric change in the face of the negro.

"Oh, Lawd, oh, Lawd!" he murmured, his voice changing and thickening a little toward the soft darky accent. "That's music to old Zacharias!"

"Do you come from Tennessee, Zacharias?"

Again there was a pause as the thoughts of Zacharias fled back to the old days.

"Everything in between is all shadowy like evening, but what I remember most is the little houses on both sides of the road with the gardens behind them, and the

pickaninnies rolling in the dust and shouting and their mammies coming to the doors to watch them."

"How long ago was that?" she asked, deeply touched.

He grew troubled.

"Many and many a year ago—oh, many a long, weary year, for Zacharias!"

"And you still think of the old days?"

"When the bees come droning in the middle of the day, sometimes I think of the darkies singing in the fields.—But I've never thought so much about it as I have since you came to the Garden of Eden. I was the stable boy for the master's daughter. That old Sammy horse used to shine like fire when Zacharias brought him out all saddled for young miss. She was like you—just so like that the heart of old Zacharias jumped when he saw you the first time. Miss Deborah would walk around that Sammy horse and keep frowning and frowning, and then she'd take her crop and rub back the hair the wrong way—but never a bit of dust came up!"

He struck his hands lightly together and his misty-bright eyes were plainly looking through sixty years as though they were a day.

"Then she'd smile at Zacharias while I was standing at the head of that Sammy horse with my hat in my hand. Up she'd climb and shake down the long riding skirt, and perk up one side of her little black hat, and settle into her jacket.

"'Sammy likes you, Zach,' she'd say, 'and so do I!'

"And then off she'd go down the road with the little white puffs jumping up behind her and turning into mist, and laughing and laughing just because she was happy!"

He lapsed into the old talk completely for a moment.

"Oh, Zach, he ain't goin' ter see her no mo'. She's done gone down dat road an' she ain't never come back no mo'. All the windin's of dat road, dey all keep goin' away an' away an' she ain't never gwine come back singing on Sammy hawse through the evenin'!"

"But why did you leave her?" asked Ruth tenderly.

Zacharias slowly drew his eyes away from the mists of the past and became aware of the girl's face once more. When he spoke again the dialect was gone.

"Because my soul was burning in sin. It was burning and burning!"

"But you'd like to go back. The young missee might have a daughter—just as young as I am. Wouldn't you like to go back?"

The head of Zacharias fell and he knitted his fingers.

"Coming to the Garden of Eden was like coming into heaven. There's no way of getting out again without breaking the law. The Garden is just like heaven!"

Connor spoke for the first time.

"Or hell!" he exclaimed.

It caused Ruth Manning to cry out at him softly; Zacharias was mute.

"Why did you say that?" said the girl, growing angry.

"Because I hate to see a bad bargain," said the gambler. "And it looks to me as if our friend here paid pretty high for anything he gets out of the Garden."

He turned sharply on the negro.

"How long have you been working here?"

"Sixty years. Long years!"

"And what have you out of it? What clothes?"

"Enough to wear."

"What food?"

"Enough to eat."

"A house of your own?"

"No."

"Land of your own?"

"No."

"Sixty years and not a penny saved! That's what I call a sharp bargain! What else have you gained?"

"A good bright hope of heaven."

"But are you sure, Zacharias? Are you sure? Isn't it possible that all these five white masters of yours may have been mistaken?"

Zacharias could only stare in his horror. Finally he turned away and went silently across the patio.

"Ben," cried the girl softly, "why did you do it? Aside from torturing the poor man, what if this comes to David's ear?"

Connor snapped his finger. His manner was that of one who knows that he has taken a foolish risk and wishes to brazen the matter out.

"It'll never come to the ear of David! Why? Because he'd wring the neck of the old chap if he even guessed that he'd been talking about leaving the valley. And in the meantime I cut away the ground beneath David's feet. He has not standing room, pretty soon. Nothing left to him, by Jove, but his own conceit, and he has tons of that! Well, let him use it and get fat on it!"

She wondered why Connor had come to actually hate the master of the Garden. Surely David of Eden had never harmed the gambler. She remembered something that she had heard long before: that the hatred always lies on the side of the injurer and not of the injured.

They heard David's voice, at this point, approaching, and in another moment a small cavalcade entered the patio.

CHAPTER XXX.

JUDGMENT.

FIRST, a white flash beneath the shadow of the arched way, came a colt at full run, stopping short with four sprawling, braced feet at the sight of the strangers. It was not fear so much as surprise, for now it pricked its ears and advanced a dainty step or two. Ruth cried out with delight at the fawn-like beauty of the delicate creature. The Eden Gray was almost white in the little colt, and with its four dark stockings it seemed, when it ran, to be stepping on thin air. That impression was helped by the comparatively great length of the legs.

Next came the mother, walking, as though she was quite confident that no harm could come to her colt in this home of all good things, but with her fine head held high and her eyes luminous with concern, a little anxious because the youngster had been out of sight for a moment.

And behind them strode David with Elijah at his side.

Ruth could never have recognized the

old negro as the statuesque figure which had confronted David on the previous day. He was now bowing and scraping like some withered old man, striving to make a good impression on a creditor to whom a great sum was owing. She remembered then what David had told her earlier in the day about the judging of Timeh, the daughter of Juri. This, then, was the crisis, and here was Elijah striving to conciliate the grim judge. The old man kept up a running fire of talk while David walked slowly around the colt. Ruth wondered why the master of the Garden did not cry out with pleasure at sight of the beautiful creature. Connor had drawn her back a little.

"You see that six months' mare?" he said softly, with a tremor in his voice. "I'd pay ten thousand flat for her the way she stands. Ten thousand—more if it were asked!"

"But David doesn't seem very pleased."

"Bah! He's bursting with pleasure. But he won't let on because he doesn't want to flatter old Elijah."

"If he doesn't pass the colt do you know what happens?"

"What?"

"They kill it!"

"I'd a lot rather see them kill a man!" snarled Connor. "But they won't touch *that* colt!"

"I don't know. Look at poor Elijah!"

David, stopping in his circular walk, now stood with his arms folded, gazing intently at Timeh. Elijah was a picture of concern. The whites of his eyes flashed as his glances rolled swiftly from the colt to the master. Once or twice he tried to speak, but seemed too nervous to give voice.

At length: "A true daughter of Juri, O David. And was there ever a more honest mare than Juri? The same head, mark you, deep from the eye to the angle of the jaw. And under the head—come hither, Timeh!"

Timeh flaunted her heels at the sun and then came with short, mincing steps.

"At six months," boasted Elijah, "she knows my voice as well as her mother. Stay, Juri!"

The inquisitive mare had followed Timeh, but now, reassured, she dropped her

head and began cropping the turf of the patio. Still, from the play of her ears, it was evident that Timeh was not out of the mother's thoughts for an instant.

"Look you, David!" said Elijah. He raised the head of Timeh by putting his head beneath her chin.

"I can put my whole hand between the angles of her jaw! And see how her ears flick back and forth, like the twitching ears of a cat! Ha, is not that a sign?"

He allowed the head to fall again, but he caught it under his arms and faced David in this manner, throwing out his hand in appeal. Still David spoke not a word.

With a gesture he made Elijah move to one side. Then he stepped to Timeh. She was uneasy at his coming, but under the first touch of his hand Timeh became as still as rock and looked at her mother in a scared and helpless fashion. It seemed that Juri understood a great crisis was at hand; for now she advanced resolutely and with her dainty muzzle she followed with sniffs the hand of David as it moved over the little colt. He seemed to be seeing with his fingertips alone, kneading under the skin in search of vital information. Along the muscles those dexterous fingers ran, and down about the heavy bones of the joints, where they lingered long, seeming to read a story in every crevice.

Never once did he speak, but Ruth felt that she could read words in the brightening, calm, and sudden shadows across his face.

Elijah accompanied the examination with a running-fire of comment.

"There is quality in those hoofs, for you! None of your gray-blue stuff like the hoofs of Tabari, say, but black as night and dense as rock. Aye, David, you may well let your hand linger down that neck. She will step freely, this Timeh of mine, and stride as far as a mountain-lion can leap! Withers high enough. That gives a place for the ligaments to take hold. A good long back, but not too long to carry a weight. She will not be one of your gaunt-bellied horses, either; she will have wind and a bottom for running. She will gallop on the third day of the journey as

freely as on the first. And she will carry her tail well out, always, with that big, strong dock."

He paused a moment, for David was moving his hands over the hindlegs and lingering long at the hocks. And the face of Elijah grew convulsed with anxiety.

"Is there anything wrong with those legs?" murmured Ruth to Connor.

"Not a thing that I see. Maybe the stifles are too straight. I think they might angle out a bit more. But that's nothing serious. Besides, it may be the way Timeh is standing. What's the matter?"

She was clinging to his arm, white-faced.

"If that colt has to die I—I'll want to kill David Eden!"

"Hush, Ruth! And don't let him see your face!"

David moved back from Timeh and again folded his arms.

"The body of the horse is one thing," ran on Elijah uneasily, "and the spirit is another. Have you not told us, David, that a curious colt makes a wise horse? That is Timeh! Where will you guess that I found her when I went to bring her to you even now? She had climbed up the face of the cliff, far up a crevice where a man would not dare to go. I dared not even cry out to her for fear she would fall if she turned her head. To have climbed so high was almost impossible, but how would she come down when there was no room for her to turn?"

"I was dizzy and sick with grief. But Timeh saw me, and down she came, without turning. She lifted her hoofs and put them down as a cat lifts and puts down wet paws. And in a moment she was safe on the meadow and frisking around me. Juri had been so worried that she made Timeh stop running and nosed her all over to make sure that she was unhurt by that climb. But tell me: will not a colt that risks its life to climb for a tuft of grass, run till its heart breaks for the master in later years?"

For the first time David spoke.

"Is she so wise a colt?" he said.

"Wise?" cried Elijah, his eye shining with joy at the opening which he had made. "I talk to her as I talk to a man.

She is as full of tricks as a dog. Look, now!"

He leaned over and pretended to pick at the grass, whereat Timeh stole up behind him and drew out a handkerchief from his hip pocket. Off she raced and came back in a flashing circle to face Elijah with the cloth fluttering in her teeth.

"So!" cried Elijah, taking the handkerchief again and looking eagerly at the master of the Garden. "Was there ever a colt like my Timeh?"

"The back legs," said David slowly.

Elijah had been preparing himself to speak again, with a smile. He was arrested in the midst of a gesture and his face altered like a man at the banquet at the news of a death.

"The hind legs, David," he echoed hollowly. "But what of them? They are a small part of the whole! And they are not wrong. They are not very wrong, oh my master!"

"The hocks are sprung in and turned a little."

"A very little. Only the eye of David could see it and know that it is wrong!"

"A small flaw makes the stone break. At a rotten knothole the great tree snaps in the storm. And a small sin may undermine a good man. The hind legs are wrong, Elijah."

"To be sure. In a colt. Many things seem wrong in a colt, but in the grown horse they disappear!"

"This fault will not disappear. It is the set of the joint and that can never be changed. It can only grow worse."

Elijah, staring straight ahead, was searching his brain, but that brain was numbed by the calamity which had befallen him. He could only stroke the lovely head of the little colt and pray for help.

"Yesterday," he said at length in a trembling voice, "Elijah, as a fool, spoke words which angered his master. Back on my head I call them now. David, do not judge Timeh with a wrathful heart."

"Let the sins of Elijah fall on the head of Elijah, but let Timeh go unpunished for my faults."

"You grow old, Elijah, and you forget. The judgment of David is never colored

by his own likes and dislikes, his own wishes and prejudice. He sees the right, and therefore his judgments are true."

"Aye, David, but truth is not merciful, and blessed above all things is mercy. When you see Timeh, think of Elijah. How he has watched over the colt, and loved it, and played with it, and taught it, by the hours, the proper manners for a colt and a mare of the Garden of Eden."

"That is true. It is a well-mannered colt."

The negro caught at a new straw of hope.

"Also, in the field, if two colts race home for water and Timeh is one, she reaches the water first—always. She comes to me like a child. In the morning she slips out of the paddock, and coming to my window, she puts in her head and calls me with a whinny as soft as the voice of a man. Then I arise and go out to her and to Juri."

Ruth was weeping openly, her hand closed hard on the arm of Connor; and she felt the muscles along that arm contract. She almost loved the gambler for his rage at the inexorable David.

"Consider Juri, also," said Elijah. "Seven times—I numbered them on my fingers and remembered—seven times when the horses were brought before you in the morning, you have called to Juri and mounted her for the morning ride—that was before Giani was raised to his full strength. And always the master has said:

"'Stout-hearted Juri! She pours out her strength for her rider as a generous host pours out his wine!'"

David frowned, but plainly he was touched.

"Juri!" he called, and when the noble mare came to him, he laid his hand on her mane.

"Who has spoken of Juri? Surely I am not judging her this day. It was Matthew who judged her when she was a foal of six months."

"And it was Matthew," added Elijah hastily, "who loved her above all horses!"

"Ah!" muttered David, deeply moved.

"Consider the heart of Juri," went on Elijah, timidly following this new thread of argument. "When the mares neigh and

the colts come running, there will be none to gallop to her side. When she goes out in the morning there will be no daughter to gallop around and around her, tossing her head and her heels. And when she comes home at night there will be no tired foal leaning against her side for weariness."

"Peace, Elijah! You speak against the law."

In spite of himself, the glance of Elijah turned slowly and sullenly until it rested upon Ruth Manning. David followed the direction of that look and he understood. There stood the living evidence that he had broken the law of the Garden at least once. He flushed darkly.

"The colt's gone," said Connor in a savagely-controlled murmur to the girl. "That devil has made up his mind. His pride is up now!"

Elijah, too, seemed to realize that he had thrown away his last chance.

He could only stretch out his hands with the tears streaming down his black, wrinkled face and repeat in his broken voice: "Mercy, David, mercy for Timeh and Juri and Elijah!"

But the face of David was iron.

"Look at Juri," he commanded. "She is flawless, strong, sound of hoof and heart and limb. And that is because her sire and her mother before her were well seen to. No narrow forehead has ever been allowed to come into the breed of the Eden Grays. I have heard Paul condemn a colt because the very ears were too long and flabby and the carriage of the horse dull. The weak and the faulty have been gelded and sent from the Garden or else killed. And therefore Juri to-day is stout and noble, and

Glani has a spirit of fire. It is not easy to do. But if I find a sin in my own nature, do I not tear it out at a price of pain? And shall I spare a colt when I do not spare myself? A law is a law and a fault is a fault. Timeh must die!"

The extended arms of Elijah fell. Connor felt Ruth surge forward from beside him, but he checked her strongly.

"No use!" he said. "You could change a very devil more easily than you can change David now! He's too proud to change his mind."

"Oh," sobbed the girl softly, "I hate him! I hate him!"

"Let Timeh live until the morning," said David in the same calm voice. "Let Juri be spared this night of grief and uneasiness. If it is done in the morning she will be less anxious until the dark comes, and by that time the edge of her sorrow shall be dulled."

"Whose hand," asked Elijah faintly—"whose hand must strike the blow?"

"Yesterday," said David, "you spoke to me a great deal of the laws of the Garden and their breaking. Do you not know that law which says that he from whose household the faulty mare foal has come must destroy it? You know that law. Then let it not be said that Elijah, who so loves the law, has shirked his lawful burden!"

At this final blow poor Elijah lifted his face.

"Lord God!" he said, "give me strength. It is more than I can bear!"

"Go!" commanded the master of the Garden.

The negro turned slowly away. As if to show the way, Timeh galloped before him.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



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The Passing of Frisco Dan

by Edgar Daniel Kramer



"I GUESS th' truth o' th' matter is"—Mrs. Wrenn was airing her views in her customary shrill and decisive manner, as she peered with gimlet eyes around the circle of the Ladies' Aid, who were busily sewing and gossiping that afternoon in her parlor—"I guess th' truth is, nobody's really breakin' their necks after th' girl nohow. She's well-nigh on to twenty-eight now, an' that's gittin' to be some antique. Dreamin' her fool dreams an' readin' her silly stories, she turned down most o' th' nice boys in town, an' now there's none to have her an' none to want her neither. Of course, with th' house an' th' money her pa left her, she may git a man, but even then I have my doubtin's. Ruth Gahr'll live an' die an old maid, er I miss my guess. She'll look an' wait a mighty long time fer her handsome Prince Charmin' to come gallopin' down Main Court," she ended with a harsh laugh.

Amid the concurring nods of her companions she bit off a thread with a vicious click of her little teeth and began rocking back and forth with an air of supreme satisfaction.

Ruth Gahr, tall and slender, fair-haired and blue-eyed, was passing at the moment, and Mrs. Wrenn's voice, having in it something of the irritating rasp of a file, floated out to her through the open windows and the thick vines that screened the Wrenn

veranda. For the girl all the sunshine was suddenly blotted out of the day.

"An' they do be sayin' th' other day she got a copy o' one o' them matrimonial papers," Mrs. Wrenn cackled on. "Growin' desperate, I guess. Who sent it to her?" she sniffed. "Like as not Ruth Gahr sent fer it her own self!"

Ruth flushed and hurried on, fighting hard to hold back the tears. She knew she was a person apart in the life of Weston. Many Weston men had wooed her, but the romance in her nature had revolted against being the wife of a small town shopkeeper or clerk. Those of her own age were now married and occupied in bringing up families; the younger set, with its promiscuous smoking, drinking, and petting, naturally did not appeal to her.

However, she still had visions of love's coming into her life. As she sat in her room she was *Elaine* in her tower, ever dreaming of *Launcelot's* coming. She watched and laughed and idled away hours at the old square piano. Now, Mrs. Wrenn's caustic words ringing in her ears, she hastened home, threw herself across the bed, and burst into violent sobbing.

"Cats!" she breathed brokenly. "Cats! All of them! I won't let them hurt me! I won't! I won't!"

Then, to be consistently the inconsistent feminine, she tumbled back upon the pillows

and continued her cry. Finally she rose, powdered her face so as to remove all traces of tears, and went to her desk. She smiled rather grimly as she rustled through the pages of the matrimonial sheet, which had but recently come to her. With flashing eyes and flushed cheeks she tore the offending paper into a thousand bits and tossed them into the waste basket with a gesture of disgust.

"Cats!" she gulped. Then: "I wonder if that Wrenn woman's right. Maybe nobody does want me," she kept repeating as she hurried down the stairs and out into the garden, bent upon finishing her interrupted walk, still blinded by the tears that persisted in spite of her, lost to everything but the biting sarcasm in Mrs. Wrenn's too well remembered words.

While Ruth Gahr was having her cry out Robert Truman had arrived on the Blue Mountain Express and registered at the Weston House. Jimmy Dobbs, the affable desk clerk, envied the stranger the look of just rightness that covered him like a cloak.

"A sure-fire winner, any place, any time," Jimmy thought as he mechanically blotted the heavy-stroked signature and took in the new guest from the top of his silver-gray hat to the tip of his cordovan boot.

"Can you direct me to the Farmers' National Bank?" Truman asked, flicking a bit of dust from his sleeve with a white silk handkerchief.

"The Farmers' National?" Jimmy queried, his eyes widening momentarily.

"Yes."

"You walk up Main Street three blocks to Main Court," Jimmy explained. "The cross streets are all plainly marked. The Farmers' National is the third building from the corner on the left-hand side of Main Street. It's a new marble-front building, the finest in town. Weston's proud of that building, sir. You can't possibly go wrong, Mr. Truman."

But the stranger was gone.

"Looks like a millionaire," Jimmy mused. "I wonder what he can be wanting at the bank."

In the meantime Mr. Robert Truman

was leisurely wending his way up Main Street, the cynosure of all eyes and the subject of infinite speculation. He passed the Wrenn dwelling and was slowly approaching Main Court. Mrs. Wrenn, posted at the window, as was her custom, saw him go by, craned her neck a great deal so as to peer through the intervening foliage, and, open-mouthed, watched him with popping eyes.

"Sakes alive!" she ejaculated, dropping her sewing and hurrying to the telephone to ring up her dear friend Mrs. Lacey. She gloated as she heard the other receivers on the party line click off their hooks. "Listen, dear," she gushed. "Ruth Gahr comes hurryin' up Main Court jus' now, blind as usual an' dreamin' her fool dreams, when she bumps headlong into some strange man right here on th' corner. Twisted her ankle, I guess, 'cause he's lifted her up an' he's helpin' her home now. Ruth jus' kind o' crumpled up an' fell to th' sidewalk. I wonder who he is, where he came from, an' what he's wantin' here?" she queried all in one breath. "Somethin's up, an' I bet it's no good, neither. Shockin', I'd say. Nobody there but him an' her an' ol' Hetty, who's deaf an' well-nigh blind. What's he doin' in town, anyway?"

Before fifteen minutes had elapsed all Weston knew about the accident, and, further, that one Mr. Robert Truman was at the Gahr house.

II.

OLD HETTY, whose ruddy face was wrinkled like an apple nipped by the frost, waddled slowly into the great shadowy parlor in answer to Ruth's call.

"Who be you?" she demanded, turning from the girl to squint hard at the tall, dark stranger.

"My card." He bowed and offered her a bit of pasteboard.

"I ain't got my specs," she snapped, turning the card this way and that in her fingers. "This ain't helpin' me none."

"Would you mind giving it to your mistress?" he asked softly.

"Mistress?" she snorted. "Hear that, Ruth? Mistress!" She laughed. "Th' girl's my niece, I'd have you know."

"I beg your pardon."

The apology was lost on the old woman, however, for she was busy with the girl's injured ankle. The man stood looking down at the two women—Ruth in a big chair, Aunt Hetty kneeling at her feet. The darkened room with its square piano and old-fashioned furniture was crowded with the exotic fragrance of the blooming lilacs.

"You have been very kind," Ruth murmured, offering him her hand.

"You will pardon my presumption, I hope," Truman spoke softly, taking the hand she held out to him and lifting it to his lips, "but I would not want this to be good-by."

"Do you mean—" she began tremulously, somewhat frightened at her boldness, a bit uncertain of herself.

"I have come to Weston on business—banking business, to be exact," he explained. "I am a stranger here. Would you object to my dropping around to see how the ankle is getting along?"

"No!" she gasped.

"You better be goin'," Aunt Hetty suggested, looking up suddenly. "This ankle is swellin' more'n a little, an' it needs fixin', not talkin'."

"Then I may see you this evening?" Truman went on, ignoring the interruption.

"Yes," Ruth whispered, hardly knowing what she said.

As the door closed behind him, trembling like a wind-blown leaf, her breath coming in little gasps, she settled back in her chair, utterly confounded by the turn matters had so suddenly taken.

"He is handsome!" she sighed as Aunt Hetty rustled away for bandages and lotions. "The whole situation is deliciously romantic." Then she smiled and her eyes sparkled. "Mrs. Wrenn seems wrong, anyway. There's some satisfaction in that."

Mr. Robert Truman stayed on at the Weston House, and, what is much more to the point, in a little while he was calling regularly upon Ruth Gahr. In spite of his initial mistake, he won the regard of old Aunt Hetty, which was no mean compliment to his personality. Soon he knew the great rambling house like a book. Al-

ways he used his eyes and his ears, with the result that nothing escaped him. In the dining room he had seen and most carefully examined the Gahr family plate—ancient, massive silver stuff that showed ghostly white against the walnut paneling. At this point his interest in the Farmers' National Bank cooled perceptibly. He learned further that a concealed safe was set in the wall in the side of the huge fireplace in the Gahr parlor. In fact he had once entered the house familiarly without the formality of knocking, and through the portières had seen Aunt Hetty thumbing over a lapful of negotiable bonds. With cunning eyes he had watched her put the papers away in the hidden safe, together with some heavy, jeweled ornaments, which she had been examining with near-sighted eyes.

After that the banking business was dismissed altogether.

"There must be a cool fifty thousand lying around the Gahr home," Jimmy Doods surmised on an occasion when the two were discussing the wealth of Weston. "Sheer carelessness, I'd say. Of course, this town's pretty law abiding. Nothing ever really happens here, so I guess the stuff's safe enough. Just inviting trouble, though, to my way of thinking. The family plate and the bonds and the jewels may tempt some rascal. You never can tell, you know. But the old lady's got a prejudice against banks ever since Elijah Harshman's got control of ours. If it were mine, I'd put all that stuff in a safety deposit vault and sleep sound at night. One of these fine days they'll be locking the stable after the pony's been led out into other pastures," Jimmy concluded sagely.

"You are a wise bird," Truman smiled. "A regular old owl, though you are young."

Jimmy Dodds laughed.

III.

ABOUT eleven o'clock the following night Truman and the women were having coffee together in the Gahr parlor. He had insisted upon attending to everything. The women laughingly yielded to his whim. He

filled the delicate cups from the silver urn and served Aunt Hetty, who sat smiling contentedly in a roomy leather rocking chair, and Ruth, who turned from her playing to settle upon the davenport. Chatting pleasantly, they sipped the beverage of Truman's brewing.

In a few moments the old lady's head drooped forward and she was sound asleep. Ruth complained of sudden drowsiness and started to lift her hands to her eyes. On the instant she, too, dozed off. Truman tiptoed stealthily from one woman to the other and listened to their breathing.

"Dead to the world like little children sleeping," he muttered to himself. "This job will be as easy as pie."

Impulsively he stooped low over the sleeping girl. Her lips were slightly parted and her warm breath fanned his cheeks. He lifted her limp hand and kissed it hungrily.

Then the French windows opened slowly, and a slouching, rat-faced, loose-lipped individual slunk into the room. Truman watched him without showing the least surprise, while the intruder carefully fastened the window catches and drew down the blinds.

"Hello, Frisco!" the newcomer turned and whispered hoarsely.

"Hello, Chuck!" Frisco replied without enthusiasm.

"What's eatin' you, Frisco?" Chuck demanded. "Ain't you glad to see yer ol' side-kick?"

"Can't say that I am," Frisco grumbled, eying the sleeping women all the while.

"Well, I should care about yer bloomin' feelin's," Chuck sneered. "You got th' skirts outa th' picture all right. That's all we wanted. A baby still teethin' coulda passed th' knock-out drops to 'em. This job 'll be like coastin' down hill."

He paused and his eyes roamed over the room.

"A sure long head you got, Frisco," he chuckled. "When you first put me wise to this racket, I didn't think it had any more chance than a wax dog chasin' an asbestos cat in hell. I sure didn't. Where's th' silver, Frisco?"

"In the dining room."

"An' th' little tin safe?"

"Listen, Chuck." Frisco suddenly lifted his eyes from Ruth. "I can't go on with this job."

"What?" Chuck rasped. "Th' job's done. All we gotta do is gather up th' loot. There you are!"

"These women have been kind to me," Frisco went on. "They have trusted me and welcomed me here. In return I'm putting this over on them, taking practically all they possess."

"This is your own scheme, ain't it?" Chuck demanded savagely.

Frisco nodded.

"Jus' as soon as you bumped into th' dame an' spotted th' silver an' th' bonds didn't you dope this thing out, an' shift from crackin' th' safe o' th' Farmers' National to friskin' these frails? Didn't you?"

"Yes. It looked dandy to me then, Chuck, but now things are different."

"Why?"

"The women, Chuck. This isn't a man's game we're playing."

"Don't get mushy, Frisco," Chuck laughed. "Don't be a fool. Money first, then th' frails. She is a good-looker, though, th' young one."

"Cut that, Chuck!" Frisco blazed.

"Oh!" Chuck exclaimed. "So that's th' way th' wind's blowin', eh? I see; I'm wise, Frisco; I'm wise."

"We'll call this a misdeal, Chuck, and the game's up."

"Maybe fer you, Frisco, but not fer me," Chuck growled sullenly. "I'm here fer my share of th' swag we agreed to split fifty-fifty. Money's money to yours truly, an' I ain't any too perticular where I git it. Gittin' it's th' important thing, an' that's just what I'm a goin' to do now."

"Not here, Chuck," Frisco insisted, and there was the ring of cold steel in his voice. "Nothing is going away from here but you."

"Don't make me laugh, Frisco," the other protested. "See any green in my eye. You ain't workin' me fer no come-on. Th' game's up, eh? Little me'll gumshoe away, an', good-lookin', you'll marry th' girl an' grab all th' spondulix. I ain't

as clever as you are, Frisco, but a blind man can see what you're up to."

"Just the same, Chuck," Frisco answered, "our little enterprise is on the rocks."

"On th' rocks?" Chuck raged, as he located the safe in the wall and began drawing his tools from his pockets. "Any monkey shines from you, Frisco, an' I'll wise up th' bulls about that little post-office séance down Windsor way. They ain't give up lookin' fer th' guy that pulled that job, you know."

Frisco stiffened, his eyes flashed, and his lips went white. With steady hands he brought an automatic to light and covered the other man.

"Hands in the air, Chuck," he ordered, "and settle here for a little while."

With his free hand he pushed a cane-seated chair forward.

"Thanks!" Chuck sneered, as he sat down. "Theatrical stuff!"

"This game's called," Frisco reiterated.

"Like hell it is!" Chuck snapped. "It's just beginnin', I'm tellin' you. When I'm through with you, Frisco, your name 'll be mud. Do you git me? Mud! Mud! Dirty mud!"

"Not so fast, Chuck," Frisco went on. "I'd explain, but you wouldn't understand; you lack the finer sensibilities, Chuck. Things look different to me since I landed here. The old lady there and the girl make me see things in a new light."

"Made you want to grab everything," Chuck snarled, "instead of dividin' with a pal. Made a hog out of you, if you ask me."

"They trusted me," Frisco continued. "I doped them so that we could make a big haul and a clean getaway. When they kneeled over from the stuff, the dirtiness of the deal I was handing them struck me for the first time. All along I'd been thinking only of getting the loot."

"You'll git it anyway," Chuck croaked. "You'll marry th' skirt an' grab it all."

"I'm going straight, Chuck."

"Don't make me laugh, Frisco; you're goin' straight to Atlanta fer a spell."

"Nothing doing, Chuck," Frisco countered. "I'm going straight." He paused.

"Ever at Sandy Springs, Chuck?" he demanded abruptly.

Chuck started involuntarily, then recovered himself, and leered evilly at his questioner.

"Ever hear of Bentley Noble, Chuck?"

In spite of himself Chuck's breath caught, and his face turned a sickly yellow.

"He was the cashier at the Sandy Springs bank," Frisco went on as if to himself, "when it was looted."

His eyes big with horror, Chuck sat staring fixedly ahead of him.

"What you drivin' at, Frisco?" he asked tremulously.

"Just this," Frisco droned. "I happen to know who fired the shot that killed Bentley Noble. Now my cards are on the table, Chuck."

The listener's body writhed hideously, as he made an effort to speak, but the words caught in his throat and he could only gasp.

"That would mean the electric chair, Chuck," Frisco went on relentlessly, "as over against five years in Atlanta."

"You win!" Chuck mumbled. "You win, Frisco!"

"The game's up?" Frisco asked.

"Yes," Chuck answered; "but I'll find a way to square things, Frisco."

"You have just time enough to make the midnight, Chuck," Frisco spoke dreamily. "Get it! Get out of town and don't ever come back again. I have the upper hand, Chuck, and I can send you to the chair. As to your squaring things, get this, and think it over. You might even pass it on to the old crowd. Your one-time pard, Frisco Dan, was killed several months ago in a train wreck in Nevada. He was mashed up pretty bad, and only the papers in his pockets served to identify him. So you see, Chuck, Frisco Dan is dead—dead for keeps, and I'm going straight."

"You go to hell!" Chuck grumbled, starting to go out the way he had entered.

Smiling queerly, Frisco followed him with his eyes. Then Chuck swung around sharply and fired from his hip.

"Maybe that 'll keep you straight fer a while," he laughed fiendishly, as he fumbled hastily at the window fastenings.

Frisco swayed, then tautened like a fiddle-string. With a quick jerk he raised his automatic and blazed away blindly, just as Chuck ducked through the windows. Then he spun around crazily and crumpled to the floor.

In the breaking dawn neighbors, who had been wakened by the shots but who had resumed their interrupted slumbers, reassured by the ensuing silence, found Chuck's dead body sprawled at the Gahr gate. A crimson trail led back through the garden and across the veranda into the room where Aunt Hetty and Ruth were just recovering from their stupor to stare in wide-eyed bewilderment at Robert Truman, huddled upon the floor in a pool of his thickening blood.

For a long time Truman was seriously ill, and Aunt Hetty insisted upon his being kept in the Gahr house as a guest, so that she and Ruth might nurse him. As he

struggled through the Valley of the Shadow, he became a hero in Weston, and the affair for a long time had the town by its ears. When the next spring stole fragrantly up the sleepy streets, and the Gahr garden was crowded with blooming lilacs, Ruth became Mrs. Robert Truman.

"How very romantic!" feminine Weston breathed in ecstasy.

"Mighty queer doin's it seems to me," Mrs. Wrenn persisted. "There was th' robber, an ugly lookin' rascal sure enough, an' deader'n any door nail; there was Truman all shot up, too; an' there was them women, both sleepin' through all that rum-pus, drugged an' unbeknowin'. What gits me," she sniffed, "is who doped 'em, as Police Chief Castle calls it. Who did that? I'm askin' Mr. Robert Truman."

But Mr. Robert Truman ever afterward religiously tabooed the incident as a topic for discussion.



East is East

Part IV

by T. S. Stribling

Author of "Birthright."

CHAPTER X.

THE SAHARA NIGHT.

A MOVEMENT of the woman Zouie awakened Million. When he opened his eyes and found himself balanced on a limb over a rumbling green void, he clutched the supporting branch with a

nightmarish feeling of falling. A sigh from the woman recalled the situation.

He looked around with a sudden shame for his weakness. "Did I go to sleep?" he asked foolishly.

"Need sleep," excused the woman in her rather deep voice.

"Lord, you must think I'm a baby—

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 22.

how long have we been here?" He moved slightly and found that his legs were numb from resting on the limb. The sun was setting, and its rays slanted through the mist and jungle in long yellow bars.

The Targui woman made no reply except to lower her arm wearily.

"Where are Goombah and Aicha?"

"Down."

Something in the woman's tone moved Jimmy's sympathy.

"Don't feel so bad, Zouie."

"No?"

"No, your hair will grow again."

The Targui woman drew a long breath and shook her shaven head.

"Not quick, m'sieu'. Two—three—four years—Zouie old woman then."

An old woman in three or four years! Million looked at her vital face and molded body. Three or four years in the furnace called the Sahara and this keen-flavored, fruitlike woman would be withered and old, devoid of passion or the power to stir men's pulse. Age holds no compensations in the tropics. Jimmy stared into the yellow mist. There was nothing to say.

The woman Zouie turned and began lowering herself from limb to limb. Jimmy moved about a little, got his legs working again and climbed down after her.

As he descended, very carefully, for he was still not sure of his feet, a wasp annoyed him by buzzing around his head. He shook his head, blew at the thing, for if one can hit any flying insect with the breath, it will not return any more. He kept blowing ineffectually. It was a small wasp with a tiny spot of carmine on each wing. Finally it darted off and dabbed at a ball of white that grew on the tree.

The entomologist glanced at the ball, then looked at it more carefully. It was shaped rather like a cotton boll. Growing curious, he deserted the trunk and crept out along the limb to it. It really proved to be a cotton boll growing on a tree. He looked around in bewilderment. At wide intervals the whole tree was dotted with bolls.

As Jimmy stared at this extraordinary fruitage, a remembrance seeped into his mind of having studied something about

cotton trees at the Georgia Tech. Now chance had landed him up one of these trees. He studied it with considerable curiosity. It was a clean-barked giant, with limbs of about the spacing and angularity from the trunk of a beech. A rapid appraisal of boll distribution suggested the tree would bear perhaps half a bale of cotton.

The entomologist plucked the boll to examine its fiber. As he smoothed it out he found, nestling in the floss, a small brown bug. It struggled feebly and blindly.

A glance showed Jimmy it was an ordinary boll weevil, such as ravage Texas and the Southern States. Moreover, this particular weevil had been stunned. It wiggled its legs without coördination and waved its antennæ up and down.

The entomologist knew the sign quite well. It had been stung by the wasp in that quick dab he had witnessed. Then the enormous significance of his find swept over him. It sent a tingle from his legs to his scalp.

The wasp was the parasite of the weevil. That wasp at which he had been blowing was the quest of his journey around the earth. He had blown at it—blown it away—but he had its egg in this stunned weevil.

A rush of happiness, of delirium, seized Million as he realized what had happened.

"Zouie! Zouie!" he screamed. "Wait! Wait!" With trembling fingers he twisted the floss over this precious bug and thrust it inside his belaced shirt.

The woman looked up at him.

"Look what I've found! Oh, look!" He began climbing down toward her at the risk of his neck.

"What, m'sieu'?"

"A million-dollar bug—a billion-dollar bug!" He shoved it around inside the back of his shirt so he would not smash it with his stomach as he slid down the tree. "Goombah! Goombah!" he shouted, wanting to take the whole party into his happiness.

"But what?" cried Zouie when he reached her level.

Jimmy groped in his shirt and hauled out his precious boll. Zouie looked at it, at Million's illuminated face, at the bug,

He put it back and continued downward, taking monkeylike chances. "Goombah, wait for me, boy, I've got the greatest thing—"

As he scrambled down he glimpsed Goombah and Aicha through a hole in the tangle. Both had heard his frantic shouting above the roar of the falls and were peering up.

He waved an exuberant hand.

"I'm a made man!" he hallooed, and began dropping again.

The two approached the tree cautiously as Million swung to the ground.

"Goombah, I'm made! I'm worth a million a minute and all expenses paid! I'll have a wasp named after me, the SpheX Millionensis—"

"M'sieu—are you mad?" guttured the Targui.

"Not at a soul—not even at the Jap—the SpheX Millionensis—"

"A wasp named after you?" caroled Aicha. "M'sieu', do wasps have names?"

In Jimmy's perfervid mood the girl in the colored light of sunset seemed the most amazingly beautiful creature he had ever dreamed of. He ran across to her, put an arm about her waist and broke into a gay, idiotic song and waltz:

"We'll be swell, my Baby-oh,
You got class and I got dough."

The mood was infectious. The girl allowed herself to swing to the absurd waltz tune.

"But tell me about what it is?" cried Aicha, laughing at last.

"Why, the boll weevil has ruined the cotton industry of the South," explained Jimmy eagerly.

"Oui."

"Ruins millions a year."

"Yes?"

Jimmy produced his find. "See that weevil? He's got a wasp's egg in him that'll straighten all that out."

"A bug—a wasp's egg!" repeated the girl, looking blankly at the weevil.

"The point is, my trip's over. I'm a million ahead! I'm made!"

"That's very fine—a bug—" The girl began to laugh. "This is an American joke, is it? I have heard of them—"

"Joke, nothing. Now where'll we marry?" planned Jimmy at once. "We want to marry quick and beat it for America. Got to get there before this egg hatches out. I don't know its cycle—"

"Egg hatches—m'sieu', I thought it was a bug—"

"The egg in the bug—egg of the SpheX Millionensis—I'll explain all that to you on the New York steamer. Now, how are we to marry?"

"I—I don't know, m'sieu', I ride in a litter, after me come dancers—" The girl's face pinkened.

Million waved it aside.

"Oh, we can't wait for any Arab ceremony. This is a little church around the corner stunt. Say, Goombah, where can a fellow get married quick? Take us to the nearest mosque or church or pagoda or something."

During all this rejoicing the man from Ouarglum stood considerably apart from the rejoicers. Now he answered briefly that the best route back to civilization was across the desert to Biskra, and then in on the railroad to Algiers or Tunis.

"But we can't get across the desert on foot?" said Jimmy, coming to himself somewhat.

"No, but we must go to Bou Ghazoul. I told the boy, Zab, to meet us with horses and camels at Bou Ghazoul. That was our rendezvous."

"Can we walk to Bou Ghazoul?"

"We must, our horses are gone. It is impossible to ride."

"The women can't make it."

"If the women tire, I will go ahead and bring back horses for them."

While the men talked the sun set. Goombah washed his hands in the sand and knelt for prayer. While he prayed night rushed upon the fugitives with scarcely an interval of twilight. Darkness fell in the jungle while the last sunshine painted the peaks of the mountains to the north. As Jimmy looked at the distant burning peaks he thought of the man Ibn Mulai. The thought merely crossed his mind and faded again. Overhead the stars sprang out with the abruptness of arc lights.

Goombah took Aicha's hand and guided

her through the jungle to some place he had selected for the night. Jimmy and Zouie followed. The raider paused to strip down the great dead leaves of the palms and the fibrous scarf that wraps the plant as an improvised bedding. Then bearing an enormous bundle he proceeded forward again with the girl at his elbow.

As the party pushed on the growth in front of them thinned to a mere screen, and at last, with a breath of wonder, Million stepped out onto the hazy undulations of the Sahara.

The raider dropped his bundle, straightened his shoulders and stood peering southward across the star-washed expanse.

The four refugees were overlooking a northern arm of the Sahara thrust up into the Atlas Mountains. Its native name is Bougzoul, or as the translation goes, "savage desert."

The man from Ouarglum spread down a bed for the women in the sand. Then at a distance he made a billet for Jimmy and himself.

In the darkness the two men made cigarettes and lit up, then sat for a while on the sand under the glitter of the stars. However they found little to talk about. An odd constraint had come over the two men who had fought the Japanese. Million asked a few questions about the desert of Bougzoul, and when Goombah hoped to arrive at the Arab town and meet his company of Taureg. The man from Ouarglum answered briefly, and presently the two sojourners turned into their palm beds.

Million could not sleep. His amazing discovery of the boll weevil parasite ramped through his brain. He would be made a member of scientific societies. His name would go down in history alongside of Pasteur and Loeb and Litterer. He was great—great—

He began fancying the honors that Lonoke would pay him. The mayor and the lawyers and merchants would meet him at the station with a string of motors. There would be a speech and a banquet at the Culpepper House on the square. He could hear the mayor referring to "our distinguished fellow townsman, James E. Million, discoverer of the *Sphex Millionensis*,"

Little thrills played through Jimmy. He was great. From a distance of trillions of miles, Sirius and his flaming satellites looked down upon the great man, the possessor of a weevil and a microscopic egg.

A breath of desert wind set the palms clicking in the jungle. From afar off came the howl of jackals. Its infinite mournfulness caught Million's wavering attention. The jackals sounded like souls lost in hell. It seemed impossible that any living thing could give tongue to such remorse as ached in that far-off ululation. It seemed to Jimmy that the jackals must be paying the penalty of some monstrous sin committed in some other life than this. So real became the fancy, as he listened, that he wondered what abomination could have brought on such outcast punishment.

And it suddenly occurred to Million that what evolution is to western science, reincarnation is to eastern religion.

Reincarnation—it was a doctrine that sprang up in this same desert nearly forty thousand years before the great scientist from Lonoke had caught a wasp in a cotton tree. It woofed the sand, the stars and the men in eternal mystery.

He, James Million, had lived before, he would live afterwards, other lives, endless lives—a vast loneliness seized Million. He lost his very moorings in time. He belonged neither to his year nor his century. His very kinspeople sloughed away from him in this dissolving thought. He was flotsam in eternity. He shuddered, sat up and definitely abandoned sleep. He wanted to be with some one. He wanted a human anchor in this void. A thought of Aicha came to the American and he wondered if she were awake. He got to his feet cautiously, with a strong desire not to awake the Targui. It would make no difference, certainly. Aicha was to be his wife. The giant from Ouarglum had no rights at all. Still, he moved carefully, away through the sand.

Toward the east the moon appeared a conflagration below the horizon. A few minutes later its cusp cut the rim of the desert. Million walked more certainly in the illumination, skirting the edge of the jungle to where the women slept. He won-

dered how he could awake her without disturbing Zouie.

He went forward, and as he turned a curve in the contour of the vegetation, he saw the dark patches of the palm leaves spread on the sand.

He paused, not knowing exactly what to do. The fact that the two women were sleeping drew invisible walls about them for the American. He whistled softly, waited a moment, and whistled again.

By this time the moon had lifted its disc clear of the sand and stood white and far-away across the desert. Million was about to whistle louder when he heard a sob come from the direction of the women. He held his breath, listening, and at once thought of Zouie. It was a long, shuddering sob as of one in great distress.

The thought of the desert woman weeping through the night wrung at Million's nerves. A plan came to him to call her and give her the hair he had picked up in the garden. Really it was Zouie's hair after all. With it, perhaps, she could contrive a wig or peruke to cover her shame.

With this in mind he called guardedly, "Zouie! Zouie!"

The sobbing ceased, and presently a white form arose in the uncertain light and glimmered toward him. Jimmy remained in the shadow of the jungle until she was quite near, then he stepped out.

"Here I am, Zouie."

At his voice the figure came to an abrupt stand. "You, *m'sieu!*" came her rather deep voice.

Jimmy was rather taken aback at the tone. "Yes, it's me—who did you think it was?"

"You call *me*, Sidi?" she demanded angrily.

"Look here, it was about your hair," explained Jimmy rapidly; "but I came here to talk to Aicha."

"You not marry Aicha?" breathed the desert woman in horror.

Million's face grew warm in the darkness.

"Look here, Zouie, don't jump at conclusions like that and listen to me first," he begged earnestly. "I got lonesome lying over there listening to the wolves. I

couldn't sleep. So I decided I'd come over and talk to Aicha. It's all right. We're going to be married. Then I heard you crying about your hair."

Just as Jimmy said this, the heavy sob was repeated from the women's bed. He stopped suddenly.

"Wasn't that you crying?"

"No, Sidi," said the Targui woman in a more amicable tone, convinced, no doubt, of his innocent intentions, "that is Gwarli you hear."

"Gwarli!"

"Yes, Aicha is very angry with him."

"Is he here?"

At that moment he saw the white figure of the Mooress coming toward them through the gloom. By her side came a small figure evidently clinging to her skirt and smothering its racking sobs.

"What is it, Zouie?" she asked in French.

The Targui woman made some quick reply in Arabic.

Aicha listened, and presently broke into a little peal of laughter that sounded like tiny silver bells.

"That is nothing for a European or an American, Zouie," she explained. "It is a custom of their country to spend much time in gardens waiting for ladies. You should read the French novelists, Zouie. It would explain the custom."

The Targui woman heard her out in silence.

"And do they marry them afterwards?"

"Invariably, unless they are killed in duels."

"What a shameful country," condemned Zouie.

"Not when you grow accustomed to it."

Million interrupted this little discussion of national morals.

"How did Gwarli ever find us, Aicha?"

"I don't know, *m'sieu.*"

"How did he know we were even alive?"

"He says he saw the vine we swung across on was cut and not broken."

"Cut and not broken—well, what if it was?" Jimmy pondered blankly on the short figure and could faintly discern the repulsive face of the dwarf.

"That's what I don't know," said the

girl. "He can't tell me. All he says is, 'Vine cut—you not dead.'"

Jimmy tried to stick these two premises together, but they seemed devoid of a logical middle member. He moved a bit nearer and made out the dwarf's short wide nose, the long monkeylike upper lip, and the entire absence of forehead.

"It must have been instinct," he decided.

Whatever it was, at Jimmy's approach, Gwarli stepped between the American and his mistress, making curious spitting noises.

The Moorish girl grabbed the little creature.

"Gwarli! Gwarli!" she scolded. "You shall never sleep at my feet again!"

At the queer threat, the creature huddled behind her melahaf again.

"Perhaps I had better go back, *m'sieu*," she said gently; "this little creature is as jealous as a dog."

"What was he howling so about while ago?" inquired Million.

The girl hesitated.

"Oh, that's all right," apologized Jimmy, withdrawing the question.

"No, no," interposed the Mooreess. "I—when he saw us in the fondouk, Sidi—close together—you recall—"

"Yes," nodded Jimmy, wondering what was to come.

"Gwarli ran into the count's villa for his blow gun to shoot you, Sidi," finished the girl simply. "He is very jealous. I was telling him how naughty he was to bring all the count's men down on us after he had started out to aid us."

Jimmy stared.

"You little hellion, did you do that?"

In the darkness Jimmy heard Gwarli spit at him.

The thin air struck his nostrils as heavily as oxygen.

The whole group of refugees were plodding southward, all carrying bamboos over their backs. The level light striking along the sand shot it full of blue shadows. At intervals clumps of cacti and aloes spotted the vibrating expanse. Toward the north the oasis which had formed their sleeping place shrunk to a mere tongue of green licking out into the desert. But the mountains grew taller and bluer. Distance analyzed them into slopes, surfaces, and abutments.

A sand lark flung itself into the sky almost from under the feet of the fugitives and shook down a surprising melody. The lift of the Moorish girl's head as she watched it filled Million with delight. He wished Judith Montfairly could have seen her. Judith would have caught the grace of the girl's pose with him. As he watched her, Jimmy wondered vaguely what was beauty anyway; what was this stab of pleasure struck out from color and curve. His question melted into a little tremor to take the girl in his arms, to kiss her lips—he was perhaps closer to the solution of his query than he fancied.

Gwarli, with his grotesque face and flute-player's smile, capered about their line of march. Goombah Das dominated the party. It had needed the desert to bring out his largeness. The raider strode along with his torso gleaming through the rents of his torn finery. Added to his height was a sheaf of bamboos, filled with water and bound to his back. They reached a good fourteen feet. Tied over this was a bag of dates. These provisions against the march to Ghazoul must have been heavy, but the Targui paid little attention to their weight. His hands were free, and as he marched, he fashioned some pipes out of three reeds with his knife. Now and then he blew a series of notes to see if his gamut were true. The pipes had a brazen timbre.

Million and Aicha watched him tinker with the trifle and talked of disconnected topics. They spoke of the speed of mehari camels, of how falcons were trained, of novels. Million discovered that three-

CHAPTER XI

ESCAPE.

ACROSS the sand the sun rose, a crimson disk, whose direct rays stung Jimmy Million's cheek and arm, while the shadowed side of his body remained chill. For some reason the hot and cold morning stimulated the American.

fourths of the Moorish girl's experience of life had been gleaned second hand from novels. England was a land of afternoon teas; America, yachts and limousines; Italy, Camorristi. Yet in reality, this chatter formed little part of the genuine conversation between Million and the Moorish girl. Their real speech lay in glances; in their acute sensibility to each other's presence; in mute interrogatories.

Usually the girl had her eyes fixed on Goombah Das, who moved along in front of them under the bamboos and figs. At every step he took there was visible through the rent in his shirt a wide faint play of his dorsal muscles that reminded Million of the smooth functioning of a Corliss engine. It repeated over and over and over in the gathering heat.

Some time after the youth and maid had ceased their talk of novels, the Targui paused in his whittling to look around.

"Novels," he repeated in heavy disdain. "What are novels? Nothing. They speak of persons who never existed; of women less than air. Why read of maidens who never were while flesh and blood women are around you? Nobody but a fool sits on a rug staring at pages of paper with a hot head."

He made a gesture. His eyes went over Million and paused on Aicha. The girl stared back at him with wide eyes. Her face flushed, then with the ebb she went a delicate bloodless sallow, against which her eyes were spots of charcoal. They turned on Million with some sort of question.

The swift little scene twanged on Million's nerves and completely destroyed the rapport which he had been so patiently building with the girl. It was as if Goombah Das had suddenly burst in on their privacy. It annoyed Million. Up to now he felt that Goombah Das was a sort of servant, a colored servant, such as he had in the South, aiding in this elopement with the girl. But there was nothing obsequious in this scornful outburst.

"A cultured people get pleasure out of their thoughts," he defended.

"Because they are afraid to act," suggested Goombah, returning to his whittling.

"My Lord, man, the literature of a coun-

try expresses its life—" He broke off and thought to himself: "What do I mean by talking to this huge black man about literature, in such a place?"

He looked over the desert. It stretched around him, quivering with heat. The shimmer gave him a queer impression of transparent flames playing up out of the sand. And then it occurred to him, to speak of fiction in this place of furious reality was absurd. Fiction in a furnace. And yet, out of the desert had come the mightiest literature the world had ever known—but it spoke always of God.

Million shut his eyes against the increasing glare and mopped his forehead and wet eyelids.

Zouie said something in Arabic. Her voice sounded commonplace and tired.

Aicha glanced at Goombah Das and said in a whisper, as if afraid of disturbing him: "Zouie said we ought to have a breeze—it is so hot."

"Isn't it always hot in the desert?"

"Oh, no—sometimes it is very sweet."

"Are you tired?"

"My feet slip in the sand." She gave him a sort of smile.

Million moved over to her and attempted to assist her, but where his hand touched her arm immediately grew hot and moist. She made the faint, perhaps unconscious, movement of a woman who desires freedom. After all, it is impractical to assist a woman across the Sahara.

Million loosed her and asked, to cloak the awkwardness: "Is there usually a breeze in the desert?"

"I—I think so."

"Then we must be in the center of low pressure," mused the American, taking a long breath and glancing up at the hot sky. Some trick of his mind brought up the weather maps which are posted in the little green street booths of American cities. He recalled their swirls of isotropic lines circling regions of low pressure. He was in one of these.

With the gradual rise of heat, the glare of the sand set up a faint sensation in the back of Million's eyes which presently defined itself as pain. The vast circle of the horizon seemed burdened with light. As

the sun climbed up all feeling of progress, which had buoyed them during the morning, was gone. They lifted their feet up and down in the yielding sand like marionettes. Amid an endless fulgor the faint break of their trail lay behind them in the sand and lost itself amid the dunes.

Suddenly a hot breath blew against their faces. It might have been a single cough from a furnace, for it died as abruptly as it arose. It startled Million, who looked about at his companions. Then a queer thing happened.

The entomologist happened to glance toward the southwest and saw they had come in sight of a grove of palms, a lake, and some Arab tents. He could see the details clearly; three camels waded into the lake, and as they drank their waves disturbed the reflected images of the palms. The scene surprised and heartened Million. He straightened up.

"Is that Ghazoul, Goombah? Have we reached it this quickly?"

The Targui did not even glance around. "It is the hand of Allah, *m'sieu*." And even while he burred the sentence it all flickered out, leaving in its stead only a dazzling emptiness.

Million moved on with an eerie feeling. There was something uncanny in the *fata morgana*. He moved on, mopping his face, closing his eyes, and lifting his brows in an effort to rid himself of the painful little lead weights which seemed pressing down on the back of his eyeballs. Then out of the south appeared mountains, phantom snowy peaks, and wooded slopes; a dome of some mosque gleamed against a piny background, and even a snow field mocked the wanderers.

Jimmy moved close to Aicha in this fantasia of heat. It held something sinister. It was as if some jinni focused these vast mirrors of heated air in sheer diablerie. Million stared at it, almost unable to resist its impression of reality. A line of pain was now steadily aching through his temples just back of his eyes. If he could only reach the mosque—

In the midst of the phantom play Goombah Das held up his hand, and the fugitives came to a halt.

"It is midday," he intoned. "May Allah be merciful."

He laid down his canes and dates, stooped and scrubbed his hands in the hot sand ceremoniously, then prostrated himself toward the east.

The dwarf Gwarli joined the Targui and copied his genuflections. And something in the mirages caused the man from Arkansas to kneel. In this maze of illusion, the huge Targui kneeling, flooded with light, seemed a single reality.

The two women withdrew to a clump of aloe, scarlet with blooms. They were not allowed to remain with the men and the dwarf at prayer. None but male hearts might approach the power behind this blinding light.

As Million knelt the sun struck through his shirt and stabbed his back. Quivers crawled up and down his spine. He tried again to think of God.

In his attitude of prayer certain terrible similes from the old Bible recurred to him. He had no idea when or where he had heard them, but now they came to him: "My bowels boiled and rested not." "My skin is black upon me, my bones are burned with heat." "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?"

Now Million realized that such phrases that shook men apart like bags of carrion could have been written only in the desert. And at last the man from Lonoke felt that they were true. With the light flaming down on the sand and beating back into his eyes, his smug Occidental feeling of entity dissolved in a realization that he was so much skin and bones, flesh and dung; that he was some atoms stuck together with a little fast-drying water.

A grotesque comparison instituted itself in Million's head between this fierce prostration and the Wednesday evening prayer-meetings back in Lonoke, which only the women attended—who shriek at a mouse, to approach the framer of the sun!

In the midst of his sardonic reverie Aicha called out something, then shrieked. Million looked up. The dwarf Gwarli was already dashing to her. Then Million saw the girl was flying from the aloe clump with a small snake clinging to her ankle.

Horror filled the American. He shouted, leaped up. Next instant Gwarli caught his mistress, flung his arms about her ankle, and brought her heavily to the sand. In a moment he seized the serpent, and his filed teeth snapped its neck. An instant later the little monster clamped his hands around the girl's calf above the wound, applied his rolling lips to the wound, and began to suck out the poison.

Million whipped out his knife to cut the puncture. As he pushed the dwarf's mouth aside the creature bit him. He hurried ahead, jabbing the blade into the two bluish pricks, then he let the Buckwa suck again.

The Moorish girl sat on the sand, screaming something in Arabic, staring alternately at the dead snake and the Targui woman. Million whipped out his handkerchief and cut a piece of bamboo to improvise a tourniquet to prevent further circulation of the poison.

Goombah Das came striding up. He must have finished his devotions. "What are you saying to Zouie?" he asked in harsh French.

Even the girl's lips went white.

"She—she threw the serpent on me," she trembled, and then wilted from her sitting posture, prone on the sand.

Million ran around, sat down beside her, and lifted her torso onto his legs from such a burning bed. Both men stared at the Targui woman. The dwarf looked up to growl at Million, and then continued his spitting and sucking.

"Zouie—you did that?" roared the raider.

The woman snatched off her haik and stood with her shaved head bare in the heat.

"Yes, I did!" she shrieked. "It was she who had my head shaved—out of jealousy! May she die—may she rot! When I saw a viper in the clump I said: 'Let Allah decide!' I seized it in my hand. It could have bit me. I threw it at her. It bit her. May her white flesh fall from her bones! May her—"

The man from Ouarglum strode over to her, unfastening his crimson belt as he went.

"Be quiet, you she jackal!" He caught

her shoulder with his left hand and flung her to her knees, then lifted his crimson belt and began a horrible flagellation.

Zouie shrieked and writhed her molded body in tortured comeliness. The blows fell like pistol shots. Her white melahaf became splotched with crimson. She tried to catch the leather.

"Goombah! It hurts! You'll kill me!" she cried.

Million stared in terrible fascination. Every nerve in his body seemed stretched to tearing. He found himself yelling:

"Stop! Stop! For God's sake, quit!"

Presently the giant did leave off so suddenly that his very cessation was furious. He jerked her upstanding with a heft of his hand.

"Now go to Bou Ghazoul!" he thundered. "Send back horses and men! This woman shall be my chief wife! You shall be her slave, the dirt under her feet! Go!"

With a shove he sent her stumbling through the sand toward the south. She recovered herself and moved on in her stained robe with the midday fulgor stabbing her blue shaven head. Million could not withdraw his eyes as she moved away, now walking down among the glowing dunes, now mounting them, growing smaller and smaller until at last she was a tiny white figure inching toward the gigantic mirage. There was something almost allegorical about it.

A sudden breeze that might have come off of lava sprang up and burned the men and the girl. Goombah Das came over and stood so his shadow fell on the girl. He touched the dwarf with the toe of his sandal. "You may quit."

The Bakwa drew back, half snarling, his muzzle smeared with blood and spittle.

"We need something to staunch the cut," guttured the raider, tearing a piece of cloth from his clothes.

"No, don't," put in Jimmy with an American horror of germs. "Here, take this. It is more nearly sterile."

He reached for the boll in his shirt, drew out the fiber and carefully disengaged the insect from it. He laid the bug on Aicha's skirt, then pressed the wisp of cotton over

the wound and used the cloth Goombah offered to bind it on.

As he worked the dwarf picked up the stunned boll weevil and dropped it into his wide, curling mouth, made one munch and a swallow. Million saw the act. Mentally he realized that his hope for riches and greatness was gone, but neither anger nor regret touched him. It was gone. The bug was gone. It seemed quite natural in the desert. He bent over and studied the girl's pale face. Bluish shadows circled her closed eyes.

In the South the mountains and temples and cool snow fields had vanished.

"She will live," pronounced Goombah, studying the girl's face. He handed Jimmy and Gwarli a bamboo apiece, then uncorked a third and poured water over Aicha's face and throat and bosom. The wetted cloth clung to her young curves. The raider stooped, lifted her in the bend of his left arm and put the cane to her lips. She neither stirred nor opened her eyes nor drank.

As she lay white and still against the shield of the Targui's chest, it seemed to Million that he had never imagined anything so fair. Her unbound hair followed the slender contour of her body and legs and made a jet panel down her white robe. Her left arm hung straight down, curved faintly backward at the elbow. Her right lay like slender marble around the raider's bronze neck.

Goombah Das spoke carefully to the dwarf in the banjolike Mbuba tongue. Then he wriggled the ring from his middle finger with his thumb and anular and handed it to the creature.

"Run fast to Bou Ghazoul for men and horses," he ordered.

The monster took the ring, tossed away the empty bamboo and set off on his endless run through the desert.

The two men went forward with the girl. The breeze had become steady now, bringing a whip of powdery sand. Toward the south the atmosphere was not so crystalline. Then Jimmy saw that the mirage he had been following was gone.

As Million followed the Targui against the heated wind dull emotions rose in his

aching brain. What the raider had said could mean only that he meant to take the girl in his harem. Such casual brushing away of his own rights stunned the American. In fact, for the Targui merely to mention marriage with a white woman, the man from Arkansas considered an offense against all human decency and the laws of God. It aroused antipathies as wide as the whole cotton-growing belt. Now the Southerner moved along at the giant's flank with a terrible feeling.

Once more Million became aware of the Colt's thirty-eight against his ribs, but he knew he could never, of his own strength, get the girl out of the desert. If he could only bear her in his own arms—he could see the line of her face over the massif of the raider's shoulder. Her slender white arm hung about his neck. The tall canes that guarded the two whites from thirst rattled as he walked.

In the blowing heat the Southerner remembered the octopus which the desert man had torn from him. And now this mad Hercules—to kidnap a white man's affianced. There was only one thing that he—Million—could do—only one thing to this Targui, who had saved his life twice. Still, this was a matter in which a man's life is a trifle. A salt taste came in Million's mouth. He began planning Goombah Das's murder with a weary painstaking, according to his code.

The man from Ouarglum happened to glance about and saw Jimmy's face. He paused.

"Are you ill, m'sieu'?" He disengaged his right hand to give the American another bamboo.

The Arkansas reached thirstily, then lowered his hand with a queer feeling.

"No—keep it."

"Drink what you want," guttured the Targui, not unkindly. "Bou Ghazoul is not far—and wash the sand from your eyes. They are bloodshot."

"No," repeated Million. "No, no!" The "noes" went up with rising passion. He wanted to go on and tell this terrible burden on his brain.

"M'sieu, has the sun struck you?"

"No!" shouted Million. "It's Aicha—"

"She will live."

"But you—you—what you said a while ago. You know you can't do that. I am to marry Aicha at Biskra."

Goombah moved on again, leaning against the growing wind.

"I—I can't let you do it, Goombah." Million spoke heavily and was seized with a violent shudder. They pressed on into the wind.

"M'sieu'," said the Targui at last, "you have paid the Moor nothing for his ward."

"Paid! My God, is she a parcel to be bought and sold?"

"She is a woman we have stolen together, m'sieu'."

Million stared at the great back and rattling canes.

"Hell, man, you can't look at it that way—she's a white woman."

The unintentional insult passed cleanly over the raider's head. He looked down on the girl in his arms and said with a tenderness that was indecent in Million's ears:

"Ah, very white, m'sieu'."

A sort of shiver went over Million.

"Don't talk that way any more, Goombah Das."

The Targui frowned slightly and stared around at him.

"We mustn't talk about this—it isn't right—Aicha and I will marry at Biskra—you mustn't object for—for your own sake, Goombah—" Million shivered again and wet his lips. "You started out to help me—"

"To help you?"

"Yes, to help me. You know that was it."

Goombah Das suddenly threw back his head and his laughter roared down the wind. The convulsions of his chest rattled the tall bamboos and tossed the girl up and down.

"I help you! I, a Targui, help an infidel steal the daughter of the faithful!" He roared again. After a minute he checked himself. "M'sieu', you followed me and insulted me by looking on the face of my wife. I help you! The only reason I did not kill you was because I knew you would be of use to me. And, behold, it was the

will of Allah to save this little handmaid from a little worm of a man who hunts bugs and cannot even pray! I help you!"

He flung up his head again and roared to the rattling of the bamboos.

Million stared out of countenance at this Jovian mirth—prayer—will of God—what had prayer and the will of God to do with marriages? In America one's family connections and money—

"But suppose—suppose—" he cried in a tremble—"suppose she desires me and not you?"

"I can't suppose it," rumbled Goombah, "but what if she should?"

"Great God, man, even a barbarian like you wouldn't go against the desire of a woman, would you?"

The Targui became soberer.

"Does m'sieu' mean that a woman's desire should rule between man and woman?"

"Certainly—of course—"

"Why?"

"Because she's a woman!" shouted the Southerner. "A woman!"

"Is a woman stronger than a man?"

"That's the very point. She's weaker. She's a woman—"

The wind was driving dust into Million's eyes so strongly he could hardly make out the Targui.

"You're very words defeat you!" burred the raider, puzzled. "That is the reason a woman's desires must give way before her master's. What you scream with such passion defeat you. The strongest rule—always!"

The two men stood staring at each other out of sanded eyes, each speaking in enigmas to the other. Neither realized that the whole age of chivalry stood between them so that the very words they spoke fell upon each other's ears as meaningless as the whisper of the sand under the rising wind.

At this curious impasse the girl opened her eyes and stirred in the giant's arms.

"Let me down," she whispered. "Have you been carrying me?"

"Yes, you can't walk," advised the raider gently.

The Mooress remembered.

"Oh, the snake—am I poisoned?"

"If it be Allah's will you are whole."

"Is my ankle swollen?" She twisted again so positively that Goombah Das set her carefully on the sand. She felt her ankle. Worked it experimentally. Then stood up with a slight limp.

The wind outlined her form beneath the folds of her melahaf. The sand murmured against the cloth which snapped like a banner behind her. Apparently she could walk fairly well. The snake perhaps was of the viperine family which affects only the nervous system, and the dwarf's leeching had been effective.

She pulled her snapping skirts about her and tried to go forward. The hot wind stopped her dead. For the first time she seemed to realize the force of the gale. She looked at Goombah Das with a fear coming in her black eyes.

"*Sidi*," she asked in Arabic, "is it the simoon?"

The raider steadied her with a great arm, and the three pressed forward.

"It is just a blow, Lella Aicha. The horses will soon come." His words rolled down the wind. He held his hands over his eyes and peered into the heated blast.

Out of the south a smoke seemed rising out of the blazing sand, as if fuel had been piled on the leaping transparent flames. Dry heat and hot grit wove past the pedestrians. The southern horizon was blurred by flying dust clouds. The ache in Million's head increased. Once he glanced up. The sun had lost its dazzle. It seemed to hang low in air, a red hot ball, and hotter than ever.

The Moorish girl kept pulling mechanically at the melahaf which the gale plastered to her legs. She held her head down against the wind and a film of sand played over her black hair. Suddenly she cried out in an access of fear.

A nearby dune apparently broke into smoke. A gyration of sand whirled away from it and streamed down the rising wind. The dune itself dwindled like wool in the hands of a spinner. A queer whistling set up among the bamboos on the Targui's back. The giant strained forward with them, but presently stopped, loosened the thing that held them and let them dash to the sand. He kept the figs.

He pointed to the canes.

"Drink!" he shouted above the tempest. "Drink some—not enough to sicken you."

The American seized one of the bamboos and pried out the cork. The withering blast had started a pain in his midriff as if his bowels were drying. Only with the taste of water did he realize his thirst. He held up the butt of the cane down the blast and gulped the sandy liquid. It was like throwing water on bricks. Just when Million's stomach felt somewhat wetted, and his thirst was keenest, the raider reached over his shoulder and knocked the cane from his hands. Then the giant stooped and picked up Aicha again. Bending low the three bored into the sandblast. Their very footing became treacherous. The sand whisked out from under their toes and piled behind their ankles. The stuff burned them through their clothing. It was like being wrapped in a sheet of hot sand. Above the hiss of the gale, Million could hear the Moorish girl wailing, "I know we shall die—I know—"

Goombah gave up his plunges ahead and angled in behind a dune.

"Hush, little moon," he comforted the girl.

"But I shall die," she wailed, "I shall smother—"

The giant drew out his three pipes and held them before her eyes as if she had been a child.

"See my pipes, oh little flower of my soul. Could I play my pipes if you were in danger? I will play till the wind dies. Now sit here—"

He placed her very gently in the lee of the dune, then stood up behind the sand mound with his back to the blast. It set fluttering every rag on his huge torso. His legs were sheltered. He motioned Million to sit beside Aicha in the brake of his big body. He lifted his pipes with a sort of flourish, as if he were some tragic comedian in his whistling rags, and put the pipes to his lips.

There were three reeds. He fingered two and used the third as a sort of chantrelle. He played with arms akimbo, gazing at the girl. About him the storm wove rushing tapestries of sand. Not far above his head

the sun hung a huge scarlet ball. Aicha stared at him fixedly.

It was the strangest melody Million had ever heard. It began with a succession of melancholy notes from the chantrelle that sounded as if it were a voice calling in the beat of the storm. Now it was far, now near. It gave the westerner an impression of aimless wandering, of hopeless calling that repeated its phrase over and over.

Just when the insistence began to annoy the American, the second pipe kindled a gay delicate air upon the monotone of the call. It skirled up into a high heady tarantelle that danced in and out to the throb of the chantrelle. It was as infectious as the gayety of a child. The second pipe took up the tempo. The two registers pirouetted, beckoned, pursued, through a brocade of silver notes. Million found himself marking time with his feet and body. There was an utter innocence in the lilt. It was birds and children and spring-time. Queer little twists to the air suggested a little gnome tipping his head in silly wisdom.

Suddenly a snarl from the chantrelle shot through the music. The dance stopped. The storm reasserted itself. Million listened curiously for the next movement. The sibilance of the gale across the desert had become merely a somber background against which presently the piper would fling his melody. Goombah applied the pipes to his lips and there came a cadence of strange wailing intervals that ended with a shivering note. It was lonelier than grief, for grief has tasted life, but this ached for some unattainable bliss. It held the pathos of adolescence before love knows passion. Million recalled the girl Aicha standing in the garden against the blue background of the sea. The wistfulness of this music was in her eyes then—and it was in her eyes now, as she sat in the lee of the piper gazing fixedly into his face.

And Goombah piped, with the faint smile of a flautist on his compressed lips, gazing back into the girl's eyes, reproducing her secret self; the yearnings of a maiden, wistful, without form, and infinitely sweet. Such a song might have caroled in the heart of Mary when she heard the Voice.

Abruptly the piping ceased, and the rider thrust his instrument in his shirt.

"Here, help me out!" he shouted, "Yonder come the horses!"

Million leaped up, jerked back to a smothering reality. The return was sickening. Then he saw what the Targui had been about. Sand had eddied around the giant until he was buried past his hips. The man from Ouarglum had been deliberately immolating himself to make a bulwark for the girl.

Million fell to shoveling him out with his hands. At each scoop the sand went flying off into the air. Aicha arose in the blast and pressed her shoulder into the gale.

Across the desert through the curtains of the storm galloped horsemen with spears. In front of the cavalcade came the dwarf, Gwarli. He seemed like a puff ball blowing along the sand. Shouts of the Tuareg bore down on the refugees. Then Million saw there were two free horses among the riders. One was the huge white stallion which had somehow made its way home from the count's villa. Goombah Das blew a shrill whistle and the big Arabian charged out of the cortège, his long mane blowing over his neck and head. He passed the dwarf and rushed neighing up to his master.

The giant Targui crossed abruptly to Aicha, picked her up and swung her to the stallion.

"Brother!" he shouted to Million, "here we part! I will go east with this daughter of the prophet. Zab will give you a horse. Ride to Biskra and your kind. The boy will direct you. Go in peace!"

Zab whirled up behind the American leading the spare mount. "Here, *Sidi*, mount quickly!"

At this sudden abduction, the girl Aicha began shrieking and trying to twist off the stallion.

"*M'sieu! M'sieu!*" she screamed, "*Shouf!* Help! Oh, God of the Christians, help me! God of the Jews!" She twisted in Goombah Das's arms, pushed at his huge head, clawing, tearing his hair.

"*Allah! Allah!*" she called.

The man from Arkansas began a frantic fumbling for his Colt. He realized he would be murdered afterward, but his code

directed. As he flung out his revolver, he reflected swiftly that he would best shoot the girl afterward—and himself. He leveled and took swift aim through the flying sand. The stallion reared and jerked man and woman around. The bead glimmered for an instant against the great bronze chest of the Targui. As Jimmy pulled trigger, the boy Zab leaped on him from behind. The revolver vomited in the sand. Its clap whisked off down the wind with a queer effect.

Two of the horsemen leveled their lances to charge at the American, but Goombah roared something in Arabic. They reversed their lances to strike the American, while the man from Arkansas struggled with the young panther who pinioned his arms from behind. He fired at the boy's legs between his own. He twisted his wrist and tried a desperate shot at the Targui just as he swung the screaming girl across his pommel. The raider was about to vault after her, when a squat figure darted under the giant. Gwarli tipped up a cane which he held in his mouth. His jaws puffed. A flock of crimson flipped against the raider's cheek and stuck.

The colossus stopped stockstill as if some strange idea had suddenly struck him. He reached up and pulled the little dart out of his flesh. Aicha clambered down on the other side of the stallion. Gwarli turned and darted away through the sandstorm.

The escaping dwarf suddenly flung the Targui into action. He shouted at his men, leaped up on the stallion. Next moment Zab had remounted, and the whole band plunged after the dwarf.

Their shouts were audible for a moment, and then lost in the tempest. Aicha and Million stood peering after the chase. The horsemen spread out as if spearing a wild boar. For a while Million could see the squat figure dart this way and that with unbelievable speed. Zab made a cast, and the dwarf made a twist and seemed to shoot right under his horse's belly. The tiny fugitive ran into spearmen on the left. He twisted again—there were horses to the right. Clouds of sand shrouded the chase. He reappeared, was lost again. The horsemen themselves became dim silhouettes,

darting back and forth, making casts at an invisible target. Then they vanished, and the man and woman stood peering through the blank drapery of the storm.

The girl suddenly ran to Million, flung her arms about him, clung to him. A passion of sobs tore her throat and bosom, "Oh, my little Gwarli—my poor little Gwarli! Oh, *m'sieu'*, can't you help?"

A sudden increase in the wind sent them plowing along in the tracks of the chase willy nilly. Million tried to hold back. A sudden roar from the south overpowered the screams of the woman. Million looked. Three huge pillars of sand had writhed up out of the desert, and their whirling bases playing upon the earth screamed like a prodigious emery wheel. The columns staggered this way and that. Their tops were lost in the dun and flying heavens. Two of them approached each other and a blaze of lightning roared through the sand cloud. The heat became unbearable.

Suddenly out of the hurtling gloom appeared the dwarf, flying frantically toward the man and woman. His short legs blurred with motion. Immediately behind him lunged the huge white stallion, riderless, his long teeth nipping at the Bakwa.

Aicha shrieked. Million leveled his Colt and snapped on empty chambers. Perhaps the shriek of the woman startled the flying gnome. He went out of stride. The stallion reached him. Next moment the beast swung the dwarf in air shaking him like a rat. It dashed the object in its mouth into the sand and struck at it with terrific hoofs. He tramped it in the sand.

Million ran in giddy with horror and grabbed a flying rein. He beat the stallion over the head with the butt of his revolver. The furious animal swung the man off his feet and came down stiff legged on the object of its fury. At last Million succeeded in jerking off a piece of his shirt and flinging it about the brute's eyes. The stallion quieted down, trembling and snorting.

In the sand, almost under Selim's hoofs, was little more than a pair of small Turkish trousers, and a grotesque head with thick lips curled into a flute player's smile. Sand settled in its eyes and the crevices of its lips.

Aicha came running to the thing. Million shouted at her: "Let that alone! Come here!"

She veered to him, like a child, sobbing and gasping. The two succeeded in mounting Selim in the fangs of the wind.

They gave the stallion his head. He turned northward with the storm, angling east. Going at full speed, the gale tore at their backs with kiln-like heat. A darkness of sand smothered them. Clouds of sand hurtled past the laboring horse.

The whole surface of the desert seemed moving, lifting in air, in plunging sheets. Waves of it reared up higher than palms; now and then a bloody gleam of the sun exposed their whirling contours.

Somehow the Arab kept his feet. Suddenly, ahead, in a fitful gash of light, the American saw an arch made of stone and broken walls. Darkness swallowed it as suddenly as it appeared.

The stallion swerved into the lee of something. The sudden cessation of the hot pressure on Million's back almost unhorsed him. The animal came down to a walk, nosing his way along some solid masonry. Presently the steed must have entered some aperture, for the shriek of the sand became muffled, the atmosphere still, the heat less choking.

Million slid numbly to the ground. He thought he made a shift to hobble the horse with a rein, but he was so dazed it might easily have been merely a mental, not a physical movement. He reached up and took the girl. He stood for a moment holding her, listening and feebly spitting out the sand in his mouth. Then he sank down at Selim's hoofs with the girl still in his arms. The floor was sand. The moment he touched it he slept. Outside the simoon tormented the earth.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DESERT DREAM.

A NIGHTMARE persecuted Million when something awoke him. He lay a minute piecing together reality out of confusion when he became aware that a woman lay beside him, sobbing. He sat

up amid the melting ephialtes, stared at the woman and tried to orientate himself. His eyes, still gritty from sand, gave him a clew to the sequence of events that had landed him in this place. He recalled the whole tragedy and his depression shifted from his evil dream to reality.

The simoon was past. A profound silence filled his ears, broken by an occasional sob and swallow of the girl.

A faint ray of light through some entrance disclosed his sleeping place; a small chamber of solid masonry filled with sand to some unknown depth. He considered the blank walls with tired eyes, wondering where he was. He looked back at the girl.

"Feel bad, Aicha?"

"Did I wake you?" she asked penitently.

Million yawned.

"I was already awake," he lied good-naturedly.

She lay still for several moments, controlling her breathing, and finally sat up.

"You are not ill, Aicha?"

"No, m'sieu'."

Million studied her and asked gravely, "Aicha, you are not sorry you ran away with me, are you?"

"Oh, no, no!" She began to shudder.

"No, indeed, m'sieu'."

Million bestirred himself to cross over, caress her shoulder and hair and do what he could to comfort her. He felt he ought to kiss her, but he was so tired and bedraggled, and a kiss takes considerable energy, unless it is perfunctory.

"What are you crying about, dear?"

"Oh—oh, m'sieu', I—I was thinking of him ou—out in the desert—unburied—" she gasped into silence.

Million himself shivered. The adventure in the desert appalled him. He wished Time would drift him quickly away from it.

"Well," he said heavily, "buried or unburied, the world is the same to the dead, Aicha."

"Oh, no, m'sieu'," asserted the girl passionately, "when his soul comes back on the Friday of Ramadan, no woman can be at his grave to sing and dance for him. He will sit in the desert—out in the terrible desert without cypress or—or flower—or maiden—"

Her voice broke again. Million heard her catch and hold her breath until the spasm was over.

The strange Mohammedan belief in the return of souls on Ramadan left Jimmy at a loss for comfort. He knew it would do no good to attempt to disprove such a fantastic creed. He thought of arguing that Gwarli was so near the animals he didn't have any soul. But something stopped him. He was not prepared to state that the little creature who had died in service of a grotesque passion had not some manner of soul.

"Perhaps," he suggested vaguely, "some woman's soul will come back with him—"

The Mooress looked at him reproachfully.

"Sidi, you know women have no souls."

Million stared at her blankly.

In Arkansas he had been brought up to believe that heaven was practically a female institution. Not that it was exclusive. A man might get in if he produced certain spiritual credentials, but no male in Lonoke had them except the preacher, a pallid youth who played the organ every Sunday, and two Methodist deacons, while it was equally well understood that every woman in the village could pass the examination. Not that the women were particularly good, but their faults were so piffling no one believed they would be barred.

Million had never questioned this naïve article of faith, and to find Aicha holding the reverse gave him a curious shock. However, he conjured up a new and quite a material solution to the dilemma.

"I tell you what. We've got to ride back to Ghazoul, anyway. We might find him, carry him back and bury him properly."

Aicha shook her head sadly.

"We couldn't find him, m'sieu', and if we should, he is so—so big, we could not lift him to the horse."

"O-oh!" gasped Million with a sudden understanding of whom she was talking about.

A new twinge came to his depression. He arose to his feet and shrugged his shoulders with the American resolution to see the better side of things. He stooped and lifted Aicha as if she were some sort of large

doll. He brushed the sand from her melahaf.

"Well, it will be a good day for riding, anyway—wonder where the horse is?"

"Didn't you fasten him last night?" she asked quickly.

"I—I thought I did." He looked about the empty chamber blankly, then said more cheerfully, "Oh, well, he's around here somewhere—Goombah never did tie him."

These phrases were more confident than Million felt, but the girl was so overwrought that he wanted to put on a cheerful face.

"I wonder what sort of village we are in?" she speculated as they followed Selim's tracks to the entrance.

"Kybele or Tibbu, something like that. Even if Selim's gone we can hire horses or camels. I like riding camels. I rode one once at a street fair. Paid a dime. Ever on one?"

She shook her head with her lips pressed together to keep them from trembling. Together they passed out through a tunnel-like entrance onto the level desert. A cool breeze played out of the north and overhead the sky smiled a profound blue. No natives were in sight.

Immediately around the pair lay broken walls and displaced masonry. A quarter of a mile to the east a large, circular ruin of stone work slept in the morning shadows.

Then Million noticed the chamber which had furnished the sleeping quarters was of a strange shape indeed. The two had to walk away from it a little way before they realized what it was. Their chamber was the north pier of an ancient arch which stood buried in the sand, perhaps halfway to its spring. On its face was a half-obliterated inscription in Latin. Million looked curiously at the ancient monument and translated what remained of the legend:

... perpetual memorial ... victorious
eagles ... illustrious name shall forever live
in the memory of mankind ... tablet ...
imperial decree ... -tus ...

REX.

As Jimmy read this boast of endless fame on the crumbling triumphal arch, he realized he had wandered into one of those Roman ruins that mark the wastes of the northern Sahara.

The natives, from whom he had hoped to obtain camels for his wedding journey, had vanished from the earth some fifteen hundred years ago. The only living thing he saw about the place was a bat hanging head down from a crevice of the arch.

"I—I wonder where the horse is?" wondered the girl.

"We'll find him sticking among these houses somewhere," said Jimmy. "You know, Aicha, fellows ought not to leave triumphal arches scattered around like this. They go out of date and nobody knows what they are all about. Now, in America, we make wooden ones. We put up a fine one across Broadway to celebrate the homecoming of the boys. Then next week, before anybody forgot who the boys were or what they did, we took it down." Jimmy shook his head whimsically. "It's a great mistake to go off and leave 'em like this and have 'em turn into puzzles—"

Despite his light words he was looking for the horse and wondering where it had strayed.

Aicha took the little burlesque seriously.

"I suppose this was to mark some conqueror and they thought he would be immortal."

"Yes, no doubt." He walked slowly back to the pier, wondering just how far an Arabian would stray before it stopped. On his father's plantation, horses would range five or six miles when they turned them out in the autumn. He could pick up Selim's tracks.

Sure enough, hoof-prints began at the entrance of the north pier, turned the corner of the arch and headed southwest. From the first the tracks were planted in widely separated groups of fours.

Jimmy showed them to the girl. "You see these are running tracks along here. He was going like a bird. Glad to get out in the sunshine. A little farther on he'll settle down to a trot, then a walk, and finally he'll stop, and we'll catch him."

"Do you suppose he will let you catch him?"

"Sure, Arabian horses are noted for their gentleness."

The two started forth together along the disturbed sand. They could see the trail

lying in a straight line toward the southwest until it was lost among the dunes and glistening sand. As they walked on the tracks, which Jimmy had predicted would shorten into the trail of a trotting horse, lengthened as if Selim had taken wings.

Jimmy peered toward the empty horizon with misgivings.

"Aicha, perhaps you'd better go back," he suggested. "That horse may have gone further than I thought. You stick around in the shade and wait for me."

"Must I stay," she asked unsteadily, "by myself, in that place where bats live?"

"Not unless you want to, of course—it may be a hard walk, though. We must be able to see ten or twelve miles, and the horse is not there."

"I'll go along," decided the girl.

The decision pleased Million in a way. Manlike, he assumed it was his companionship that drew her into an unpromising walk. He regulated his pace to hers and glanced once or twice at her melancholy face. The expression distressed the entomologist. He had the American conviction that he ought to keep his sweetheart amused with jokes. He led up to one about a negro and a rabbit. But she listened with such a clear belief in its actuality that Jimmy didn't have the heart to bring it to its ridiculous conclusion, and it wandered vaguely to an ineffective ending.

Then he remembered that his Colt was not loaded. He drew it out, swung out the cylinder and offered to let her put in the cartridges.

She looked up at him with an expression in her dark eyes which Million could not fathom.

"Will I have to do this all the time, Sidi—after we reach Biskra?"

Jimmy stared at her for fully fifteen seconds before the import pressed in upon him.

"For the love of Mike—no! I'm *trying* to amuse you, Aicha—here, I'll let you shoot it."

She shrunk away from the weapon.

"It—it goes too loud, m'sieu!" and her distress returned to her face.

Million guessed her thoughts.

"A lot of girls in America shoot and ride

and play tennis," he said. "I thought it might amuse you."

"Do they play and shoot guns with men?" asked the Mooress with a little more interest.

"Sure they do," detailed Million cheerfully; "bunches of men and women go on picnics, camping, houseboats—"

"And the men show their women to each other?" Million looked at Aicha, then down at his Colt. "You've read about it in the novels."

"Yes, yes, that is true"—she gazed at the horizon with humid black eyes—"but novels seem so far away now, Sidi. I almost forget them—" She drew a long, unhappy breath.

Jimmy paused in his walk.

"I don't see any use going on, Aicha. That horse was still running along here—" He scanned the clean edge of the desert.

"Then—what are we going to do?"

"We'll have to go back and wait for somebody to come along."

"But will they?"

"I believe so. The horse we rode must have been here a number of times. He knew the way well enough. If people come by here it must be for water. I have some matches. We ought to be able to shoot a few desert larks. And I'm going to try one of those big lizards. Lizard steak à la Juliennne—what do you think of that?"

"I never ate any," said the girl.

"Or a fricasseed bat?"

"Nor that, either."

"Or hash brown betsy bugs?"

She shook her head.

He could not make his burlesque broad enough. She had not the faintest idea that he was doing his American best to pick her spirits up with a little buffoonery. A sort of grayness came over the man from Arkansas. His determination to be bright and entertaining company soaked out.

"Well—let's go back," he decided. She turned about docilely—too docilely—as if she had not the faintest opinion of her own as to its wisdom or unwisdom.

They had walked further than Jimmy thought. The half-buried triumphal arch, the ruins of the coliseum, the roofless villas were huddled together almost at the edge of

the vast yellow expanse. They walked toward it through the sand. And as Million plodded back, the wide silence and the passionate illumination brought a queer fancy into his head.

It seemed to Million as if all this scene were lost in a black night. It seemed that the revelers who had once lived and loved in those little roofless villas had somehow gone away and left their ruined habitations in this brief burning brilliance. But in reality night enveloped all things; blackness brooded over this desolate place. The dazzle and heat of the sun were adventitious and casual.

He looked at the triumphal arch, under which, over a thousand years ago, some warrior had passed with victorious eagles. In that little circle of stone, which were all that remained of a coliseum, his captives, no doubt, had fought and perished to amuse their conquerors for one gala day. And now conquered and conqueror were gone. Night had engulfed them. And as they went, so the fulgor of sunshine which still brooded over this necropolis would likewise go. The very sun was a taper, flaring for an instant in profound and endless night.

A vast loneliness came over Million. He glanced at Aicha, aching to communicate this melancholy conceit and so dissipate it, but he had no hope of ever imparting to her his fantasy.

And as the girl moved toward the ruins her own face was full of wistfulness and sadness. Each of the two was profoundly alone in the empty expanse of sand. Million's eyes moved aimlessly about the featureless horizon.

As he looked he suddenly reached out a hand and stopped Aicha. "Yonder's the horse—let's go get him."

Both eyed the distant speck. Then the girl said: "We might as well wait here. Some one is riding toward us."

The silhouette developed into a Targui on a white horse. At a glance Million analyzed the situation. The raider band had split up and were searching every possible hiding place for the fugitives who had killed Goombah Das. Jimmy turned and directed the girl.

"Aicha, you had better get away from me now. You don't want to get shot accidentally. I'm sure there'll be trouble." He got out his Colt, whirled the cylinder to see there was no sand in the action, then drew the hammer back for a shot of precision.

"If I get the man I can probably catch his horse, and we'll go back together. If I don't—" He did not put the other alternative for the girl into words.

Million laid down on his belly in the sand to steady his shot and reduce the target of his body. He took the short barrel of his revolver in both hands and got the bead on the approaching figure.

He laid a finger on the trigger and began to squeeze.

Suddenly the girl shrieked:

"Don't shoot! Don't! It's Goombah Das!"

At the cry Jimmy fired an accidental shot. He jumped up.

"What—Goombah?"

As the horseman galloped closer Million would hardly have recognized the man from Ouarglum except for his ragged clothes. The Targui's face was haggard and his eyes sunken. As he rode he held to the high pommel of the Arabian saddle as if he were a tyro in horsemanship. He was without any sort of weapon.

Million lowered his Colt and went forward with a complete change of attitude.

"What's the matter, Goombah? Can I help you?"

The man of the desert pulled up his stallion and whispered: "I have come for the girl, Monsieur l'Americain."

The whisper out of the vast chest was appalling. He was now within fifteen feet of Million. For a moment he sat staring out of fever-polished eyes, then got a leg over the horn of his saddle and slid to the ground. He almost fell at the impact, then got to his feet and stood tottering.

Million stood staring at the words and manner.

"What did you say?" he asked, unable to credit his ears.

"I have come for the girl," repeated the poisoned man, and he began advancing toward her slowly, a terrible stricken giant.

Million stepped between the two.

"Goombah Das," he said almost pleadingly, "don't come any farther. You're delirious—mad. Go back to your horse."

"I'm poisoned," whispered the giant in his ghastly tone, "but I'm not mad. I was never so sane. All my life before I have been mad, *m'sieu'*, but not now. Last night as I lay poisoned in the desert I had a vision. I saw this slender moon of my delight weeping for me. I saw her in this place. I saw her rise in the night, loose Selim, and drive him into the night that he might search for me. Now I have come for her—"

He was still advancing, and the nearer he came the more terrible he grew. A shudder went over Million as he thought of the work for him to do. He began pleading, talking quickly.

"Goombah—stop! You're insane! Go up to the arch—out of the sun. You're burning up with fever."

The poisoned man made a kind of smile. "I am not one of the Turks, *m'sieu'*, who sit in the Rue de la Kasbah and gaze and desire and turn away. I must—"

"Goombah!" gasped Million, cocking the hammer again. "If you don't stop—she's a woman—anything else in God's world but—she's a woman—Goombah!"

"My desire is more terrible than your bullets, *m'sieu'!*"

The American drew on the bronze chest with a shaking hand. "Goombah," he warned and begged through a dry mouth, "three more steps, and I—"

The giant appeared not to hear him. He came on slowly, straight against the muzzle of the pistol, his sunken eyes fixed on the girl.

Jimmy thought of the fight with the cuttlefish—of the piping in the simoon. He centered his bead on the man's heart.

"Your last step, Goombah."

The Targui appeared not to see the man at all. He held out his arms. "Little crescent moon—"

Million squeezed the trigger carefully, army fashion.

Suddenly a hot, paralyzing pain shot through his right shoulder. Against his will, his pistol swung down and dropped

out of his hand. The American stared around. A little stiletto was sticking in his shoulder.

The girl Aicha dodged past him and ran with a little scream into the arms of the man from Ouarglum.

The American forgot his shoulder as he stood watching them. The giant lifted her in his arms. She clung to his neck in a passion of weeping, kissing his eyes, lips, cheeks.

"Oh, Selim went to you!" she sobbed. "Goombah! Goombah!"

The huge man crouched in a transport of tenderness, to cradle her legs across his great knees and her body in his arms. The stallion whinnied. The two lovers were weeping and gasping to each other in Arabic.

Neither of them saw the American stoop slowly, pick up the Colt with his left hand, and turn back toward the ruins.

As he went there came to Jimmy again that strange impression that he walked through darkness, that night engulfed all things, that the sun was but the flaring of a taper in endless night. His shoulder burned.

As Million had surmised, there was a water hole amid the ruins. He found it in a roofless inclosure that had once been a Roman natatorium. Through the drifted sand the Arabs had dug a hole, matted with reeds, and erected a sort of shadoof for watering camels. On the granite of the broken wall was carved this oracle or cynicism, as the temperament of its reader decided:

To hunt, to bathe, to play, to laugh—such is life.

The bath was once ringed with statues. On a few of the remaining pedestals Million could trace the faint names of the emperors and governors of Mauretania.

Voluptuaries had bathed and gamboled in this once stately bath, which now lay under ten feet of sand, through which a rude shadoof drew water for passing caravans. On the day after his adventure Million went to the spot where he had last seen Aicha. Lying on the sand he found a bag of dates left by Goombah, and the mixed

quality of the Targui accented the American's emotional mood. The mixed quality of the Targui—or was he mixed? Was it not the raider's singleness of heart that made him so unaccountable?

Million lived on the dates and the water from the shadoof. Sometimes he thought of suicide, sometimes he prayed for rescue. One night he dreamed of the man Ibn Mulai, and for some dim reason this comforted him.

On the fourth afternoon a caravan *en route* from Biskra to Bou Ghazoul called at the ruins. It was composed of two parties. One contained Major Peleurie and Lieutenant Mendier, with half a dozen soldiers and a train of camels and drivers. The second party was composed of Feggy and Judith Montfairly, with two camels and an extra driver.

Mendier was not surprised to find Jimmy among the ruins, puzzling over undecipherable inscriptions. He said he had formed a habit of expecting Americans in unexpected places.

Some of the other travellers seemed astonished. Million explained that in hunting the boll weevil parasite, he had wounded himself in the shoulder, and a band of Tuareg had generously brought him here and had gone for aid.

It was not the sort of explanation that encouraged questions. Major Peleurie said he was in search of the chief of the Tuareg, with whom he had been negotiating for the right to inundate the Sahara. He had almost concluded the negotiation in Algiers, when the chief mysteriously disappeared. His name was Goombah Das. Was he with the band Million had seen? Million said there was a leader of some such name, and gave the route taken by the departing raiders.

Then the major explained his project at great length to Jimmy, bristling his mustache with enthusiasm.

Later in the afternoon, Feggy found himself near Million and indulged in a monologue, addressed apparently to the air.

He hoped the gentleman wouldn't get ignited, but that what he, Feggy, was searching for was of so much more importance to mankind than what he, the gen-

tleman, was trying to get; that he, Feggy, would have been ashamed to let any chance slip to get it, no matter whether the circumstances seemed to reflect honor or dishonor, according as them as had wide open or shut up minds might think.

"An' I 'ope," he continued in his address to space, "if the gentleman ever gets a clew to a certain hobject, 'e will remember my hold hoffer of 'arf and 'arf on the stock market winnings and put 'is hinformation hat a 'onest man's disposal."

Then Feggy turned to the shadoof to take his turn drawing water for the camels.

When darkness came on the drivers brought out their curious native instruments—*kamenjas*, *snitras*, and *rebads*—and began a minstrelsy in the firelight. Arabian music has seven keys where European music has only two, the major and minor. This gave a range and sensitiveness to their noubahs that Million had never heard.

As they played in the shadows, their modulations recalled cadences of a piper allowing himself to be buried in the simoon in order to save a woman. And somehow he was comforted.

One of the drivers lifted a burning tenor and sang of love, of harem bars and the burden of the desert beyond.

A hand touched Million's left shoulder—the sound one.

"I may sit out here with you, may I not, Jimmy?"

"Why, of course, Judy."—He moved over, taking care of his arm, and made a place for her.

The tenor sang on, in weird intervals, trying to express the inexpressible. Low in the west, past the crumbling triumphal arc, hung the evening star.

"You are not bitter, are you, Jimmy?" asked the girl after a while.

"No-o. No, not at all. I think when it all gets a little away from me, I shall be very glad."

"And perhaps some day you'll tell me just what did happen, Jimmy?"

"There's not much to tell, Judy."

"No?" Her voice was low, as if he had rebuked her.

"I don't mean it like that, Judy. I

didn't understand just where a girl's heart was—that was all."

For several minutes Judith sat piecing together all that the sentence implied. The Arabian accompaniment throbbed on in unnamed chords. At last Miss Montfairly asked just audibly, "And has it left you so very hurt, Jimmy—your shoulder?"

"Not so *very*, Judith."

"Will it ever be cured?"

"I think it has been cured, Judy, ever since somebody set out in the desert to find me, but I didn't know it."

Then somehow she had him in her arms, mothering him, tremulous to tears.

A vast and solemn peace flooded Million. Amid the passion of Melik's singing, he could hear the murmur of the pulse in Judith's neck. His fevered arm eased off into the luxury of a wound at rest.

"I wonder where *they* are?" he whispered at last.

"Who?"

"The Targui and the girl."

"I hope they are happy."

"Indeed, so do I, Judith."

"Was she the one—who did it?" She touched his wounded shoulder.

"Yes."

"Somehow I thought so." There was a pause, then Judith whispered, "I can hardly blame her, dear. Not long ago I could have stabbed somebody for—oh, for wandering off in such a wild fashion after a dream, when I knew—reality was so close at home—"

After a long while the man said, "How sweet the night is."

And the girl replied, "Sometimes I think there is no such thing as night, Jimmy—it is just the blue shadow of perpetual day."

Melik sang on beneath the mystery of the stars.

At the conclusion of their bridal pilgrimage through the northern Sahara, Million and his wife stopped by the plantation of Count Nalaczi with whom the husband hoped to make his peace. It was rather a delicate task for a bridegroom to approach a man whom he had just robbed of his betrothed. So Million was not disappointed to find the count was not at home.

The huge Japanese wrestler seemed to

be in control. He invited the little caravan to stay overnight, which they did. The Oriental spoke of the count several times, with what must be described as a kind of impassive affection, but he never did say where his master was, nor did Jimmy ask.

As the lovers journeyed back to Algiers through the Tell country, Million stopped at a place in the mountains which looked familiar and made a little detour to a certain western crag. He went forward alone. After some search, he saw a figure sitting motionless upon the point. The Westerner went up with it in his heart to ask Ibn Mulai's blessing upon his marriage. But when he came close he saw it was not the holy man, but a strange face in his stead. And only after some study did he recognize the changed features of Count Nalaczi. The hermit wore the usual breech clout and turban, and beside him lay a beggar's bowl holding a few dates. And Million stood where he was, wondering, thinking of the rich country place, of the old palace in El

Dezhair, and now the owner sitting in this bleak spot with a beggar's bowl—it eluded the Westerner. Perhaps it always will elude the Westerner.

The entomologist thought of future P. & O. tourist parties and their prattle of hypnotism, illusion, catchpenny.

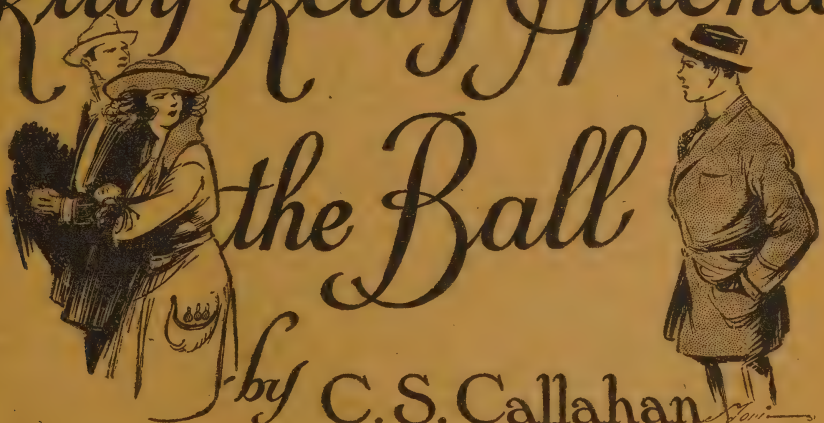
When the party reached Algiers, Million found that Panimorpholos had set up as a breeder of Arabian horses. He had a stable of two mares, a black and a bay, and both were in foal by very fine sires, so the black boy said when Million persuaded him to talk one day.

Several months after these events, Major Peleurie organized the Roudaire Irrigation Company. He was furnished with considerable funds by a certain successful stock speculator in the London Exchange named Feggy.

In about two years the Millions themselves returned to England because Algiers was no proper place to rear a little boy and his wee sister.

(The end.)

Kitty Kelly Attends the Ball by C. S. Callahan



KITTY KELLY vowed by the piper that played before Moses that never would she breathe the same atmosphere contaminated by Danny Meehan—if she could possibly help it, and she thought she could.

Danny Meehan asseverated with much vehemence and heat that never should

Kitty Kelly attend any ball, rout, assembly, chowder, picnic, theater, funeral, christening, wake, or any form of amusement whatsoever accompanied by any young man if he could prevent it; and he thought he could.

And there you are, as the sheriff said when he hung the thief.

If Paris had happened on Ninth Avenue when Kitty Kelly came tripping along, Homer would have been out of a job; the Golden Apple of Venus a Kelly trinket, Helen at home with the children, and Troy unsacked. Hence no Iliad.

A sure cure for the blues was Kitty. Jet locks, eyes twin midnight pools, Maraschino cherries for lips, peaches and cream complexion, teeth pearls of great price, and the lines of a cup defender. Bring on your Marys, Beras, Lillians, and Vivians of screen and stage, and Kitty would have been a searchlight amid tallow candles.

And there were a whole lot worse-looking fellows than Danny Meehan in the Ninth Ward. Straight as a lance; supple and strong; red-headed; blue eyes that snapped or twinkled with equal celerity; and a mouth that grinned or snarled as the occasion demanded. He had a Hibernian joy at warfare, and an invincible faith in his own physical prowess.

Bring a Kitty and a Danny together, and you have the irresistible force and the immovable object.

In the beginning Kitty set much store by Danny. Hurrying home of a night from her work in a great department store, she had been tracked by one of the beasts that prowl a large city. But just as the wolf was about to gobble Little Red Riding Hood, he found himself smitten hip and thigh, and retreated a sadly mauled and disgruntled animal.

Under such auspicious circumstances did Danny make his initial bow to Kitty.

Thereafter for a space he was her invariable escort. But Cupid is a weak little fellow when pitted against Mars. Danny's grandmother said he was "full of the devil." In fact, she went further, and said all Meehans were "devils," so it was naturally to be expected. Danny's grandmother was a Daugherty, so it implied no reflection on her own kin.

Be that as it may, the fact remains that Danny could scent a battle from afar; and right joyously would he hasten to the spot, and if possible be one of the participants in the fray.

Kitty was broad-minded, and did not object to a moderate amount of fighting.

But when Danny licked three men at the Plumbers' Ball, and was finally ejected from the premises by four policemen, who lost most of their uniforms and all of their tempers in the process, she decided that enough was sufficient. The "Welcome" sign was off the Kelly door-mat the next time Mr. Meehan put in an appearance.

"You ought to be up at the zoo among the other wildcats," was Kitty's valedictory. "I'll stay in the house the rest of my life before I'd be seen on the street with you again."

"That's where you'll stay," quoth Danny hoarsely, "unless it's yourself you go out with."

"I'd like to see the likes of you stop anybody from taking me out," says Kitty scornfully.

"Unless you go blind in a hurry, that's exactly what you're going to see," replied Danny.

Jimmy Monahan escorted Kitty to the select dance given by the "Social Five." That is, he conducted Miss Kelly as far as the entrance to the festivities, when the pair was interrupted by Mr. Meehan. Miss Kelly did not attend the ball, and Mr. Monahan paid the lady dentist on Twenty-Third Street a bit over a hundred for repairs.

Eddie Riley had quite a good opinion of himself, until the night he started to see "Lightnin'," accompanied by Kitty. On the way to the theater Eddie encountered lightning, thunder, sky-rockets, meteors, and shooting stars. It was a matter of ten days before Eddie resumed his position as charioteer of a five-ton truck.

Thenceforward the young men of the Ninth Ward shunned Kitty as though she were Medusa.

Malachi Kelly — Kitty's father — was properly indignant at his daughter's quarantine.

"I'll get me a gun and make a colander of the young pup," he declared.

"And have us pick up the paper some morning and see where you and Father Cashin headed the parade, and how natural you looked, only for the spot where the electricity burned," was Kitty's comment.

Mr. Kelly made a second suggestion.

"I'll have Hogan, the cop, beat the rap-aree within an inch of his life. He'll do it for me."

"He'd do it for me a sight quicker than he would for you," retorted his daughter. "But I'll not have my picture in the paper with 'beautiful damsel rescued from love-sick swain,' or words to that effect under it. Danny Meehan's made a fool of me, but I'll fix him before I get through. Maybe Zbyszko or Jack Dempsey might move in the ward and I'll vamp 'em. It's a long street that has no twists in it."

Mr. Kelly reluctantly refrained from interfering in the feud, and Kitty trotted along the street as blithely as if all the young men in the world were flocking to her door.

Wilfred Clancy was quite the Apollo Belvedere of Kitty's store. He owned a cute little mustache, rosy cheeks, and nice white teeth. Sartorially he was a lily of the field—also a floor-walker. For a long time Wilfred had cast sheeps' eyes at Kitty, but in vain. Kitty confided to the other girls that he looked too much like a moving-picture actor to be really human, and her taste ran to real he-men. Floor-walker or no floor-walker, she would have none of him.

Deprive a lioness of meat and she'll eat grass.

The adoration of the male was sweet incense to Kitty's nostrils, and without it life somehow seemed to lose its savor. Hence Wilfred was astonished and delighted to observe a rapid thaw in her hitherto icy demeanor. The dazzled young man fairly blinked at the favorable reception his quips and jests met from the erstwhile haughty beauty.

A few days basking in the sunshine of Kitty's smiles, and Wilfred was merely one hundred and sixty pounds of hot mush.

"I'd certainly be pleased to call on you some time," he murmured in dying-calf tones.

Kitty thought rapidly. There were a number of families in her apartment house. Danny Meehan couldn't slug every man who entered the doorway.

"Seeing that you have legs, I don't know what's to prevent you," was her assent,

"May I come to-morrow night?" he pleaded.

"You'll find me hanging over the fire-escape by my toes," said she.

When Wilfred appeared at the Kelly domicile his make-up would have turned Solomon green with envy.

"Father, this is Wilfred Clancy," proclaimed Kitty.

"Wilfred!" exclaimed Mr. Kelly.

"Yes, it's rather an unusual name," apologized Mr. Clancy, "but my mother was very fond of 'Ivanhoe.'"

"I never cared to smoke it," Mr. Kelly briefly responded.

"Oh, but this is a book I'm speaking of," explained Wilfred.

Mr. Kelly was not much impressed with Wilfred. Next morning at breakfast he said to his daughter:

"Is that the Dempsey you was going to vamp? Sure, if Danny Meehan ever lays eyes on that bucko, he'll take him apart to see what makes him tick. I thought at first it was one of them wax dummies from your store. I never heard of anybody called Wilfred before. That's the name for a cat or a goat—not a man."

"Ain't the Clancy part of it all right, father?" inquired Kitty. "I can have him change the other to Pat or Mike if you like it better."

"Keep him out of the way of that Meehan lad, or he'll be spread all over the Ninth Ward," was her father's warning.

Mr. Clancy became a frequent visitor at the Kelly's; but he was much mystified that his fair charmer would not accompany him to any place of amusement, or even permit him to walk home with her of an evening. He had never before encountered a young lady who had neither the "gimmies" nor a desire to have a gallant spend money on her. It was indeed a *rara avis* in New York.

Kitty's "buddy" and confidant was one Annie Cassidy, who lived across the street, and worked in her store.

One morning, as Kitty started to her employment, Annie came hurrying to her with eyes big with tidings.

"Didja hear about Danny Meehan?" she shrilled breathlessly.

"I did not," said Kitty promptly; "but I hope he's fell off the Woolworth Building."

"Well, he hasn't," replied Annie; "but last night he beat some fellow up, and my brother says the fellow's hurted bad, and Danny's liable to go over the road. He's locked up, and my brother says he can't get out on bail till the man is better."

"Fifty years from now will be soon enough to bail him out," said Kitty.

It was the same morning that Wilfred approached Kitty with temptation.

"I don't s'pose there's any use asking you to go to a ball up our way?" he inquired plaintively.

"When?" said Kitty.

"To-morrow night."

"Lead me to it."

"Then you'll really go?"

"Come for me, and I'll be waiting on the steps with bells on."

Thus do the three weird sisters spin the threads of fate.

"I'm advisin' you not to go out with that clothes-horse," warned Mr. Kelly. "If Meehan runs into the pair of you the air'll be full of feathers."

"He can't," said Kitty; "he's locked up."

"Maybe he is, and maybe he isn't," was her father's sage reply; "the lad has a pull."

The night of the ball found Kitty and her swain footing it merrily along Ninth Avenue in the direction of the Elevated station.

A cluster of men were standing at the corner of Twenty-Second Street. At their approach, one of the group detached himself and blocked the path. Kitty's heart stood still. It was the dreaded foe.

"Good evening to you, Miss Kelly," said Danny pleasantly. "I see you have one of

the neighbor's children out for a walk. He seems like a nice little fellow, but his mamma didn't fasten his tie right. I'll fixt it."

With a mighty wrench he tore off Wilfred's collar and cravat.

The maltreated young man stood helplessly with chalky face and bulging eyes. The crowd laughed, and Krausmier, the butcher, leaned in the door of his shop—a wide grin on his fat countenance.

"And now, Kitty dear," said the terrible Meehan with mock solicitude, "I'm afraid the night air is bad for you, so kiss me good-by, and take the little boy home."

Kitty struck him in the mouth, but he only grinned, and wrapped her close in his arms.

Krausmier gave vent to a pained grunt as Wilfred Clancy's elbow struck his rather prominent stomach. Wilfred was in the shop and out again in a second. And when he came out he had a cleaver in his hand. As his feet struck the sidewalk, he emitted a shrill yell.

The Danes heard that identical sound at Clontarf, so did the English at Fontenoy. It is the battle-cry of Ireland, and spells death.

Danny Meehan took one look at the avenging avalanche, and fled like a deer.

The king was dead.

Wilfred stood breathing heavily as he swung the cleaver.

"I'm sorry the evening's spoiled," he said. "I guess you'll want to go home."

"For why? Home was never like this," trilled Kitty. "You can buy another collar and tie right across the street. We started to go to the ball, and to the ball we're going. I'd just like to see any mutt try to stop us."

"So would I," agreed Wilfred.

And hand in hand *Juliet* and her *Romeo* went forward to trip the light fantastic toe.

"I CAN EXPLAIN"

is the film title for "Stay Home," Edgar Franklin's comedy serial that ran in ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY from November 19 to December 17, 1921. Gareth Hughes is starred in the picture by Metro, and it is now on view throughout the country.

An Algerian Escapade



by *Helen A. Holden*

MISS TOMLINSON'S attention was equally divided between her grapefruit, her guide book, and the open doorway. Her eyes traveled with clockwork regularity—from one to the other till the circle was complete, then began all over again.

At last with nervous haste she took her napkin from her lap, laid it across the open page of the book, shut the book and rose from her chair. But before she had time to leave the table she saw a young girl, followed by a man, enter the dining salon.

She sank down on her chair again with a sigh of relief.

"I couldn't imagine what had happened, my dear, and was just starting to look for you," she exclaimed as the girl took her place next to her at the table while the young man sat opposite. "We have so much before us we must get started, you know."

"I've been on deck," explained Joan. "Algiers with the sun shining on it is a sure enough picture-book town—and the harbor! Why is the water and the sky so much bluer here than on our side of the Atlantic?"

"Does it tell, Miss Tomlinson, in your guide?" asked Grant Allen from across the table.

Miss Tomlinson's hand fluttered over her book as if uncertain as to whether the question was to be treated seriously or not.

When Joan had time to think about it

she was still a little puzzled to find herself so far from home with only Miss Tomlinson and no one of her immediate family, which consisted of her father and brother. She and her father had taken yearly rambles to all sorts of out-of-the-way places.

These had always been during the summer months. This year, Joan's first out of school, they had planned to start in April. The plans had been completed and final arrangements made when her father found it would be impossible to leave business.

Joan would gladly have given up the trip, but almost before she knew it a friend had slipped Miss Tomlinson in to take her father's place—they had left New York behind—and were heading toward the Mediterranean.

Joan had never met Miss Tomlinson before. She had been warmly recommended as a most estimable companion—traveling or otherwise—by this very recent and alarmingly intimate friend of her father's.

She had a dim foreboding that when she returned her position would no longer be at the head of the table—opposite her father—but that this place would be occupied by this same new friend. But this was something she hardly admitted to herself.

Miss Tomlinson had been born in a small provincial village in which she had spent some forty odd years of colorless existence. As soon as a severe attack of seasickness permitted she spent her days on ship-

board poring over the various books that gave any information on the trip before her. It all seemed very bewildering to the little lady who had never been outside Greenville Center before.

She tried her conscientious best to prepare Joan with the same sort of knowledge, or at least an inventory of the things one was supposed to see. But Joan firmly refused to prepare.

Joan shocked the conservative Miss Tomlinson by insisting that she wished to leave her mind a blank. In this way only could she catalogue to suit herself the impressions that came to her.

So while Miss Tomlinson spent hours each day poring over an endless collection of books, Joan was free to enjoy the same hours lazily with her brother's old friend, Grant Allen.

The first day out Joan had recognized Grant. But it was not till the second day that by fitting the name to the girl Grant had become convinced that Joan was the same short-skirted, bob-haired tomboy he had known at her brother's home.

He came to the immediate conclusion that there are many more years difference between fourteen and eighteen, than between eighteen and twenty-two.

Grant had finished college the year before, and had spent the nine months since in an architect's office. Pleased at the progress he had made his father had given him six months of travel to equip him more fully for his chosen profession.

It took several days for him to become accustomed to this grown-up, self-possessed, captivating Joan he had always considered a "nice kid." Then he regretted the time thus lost, and tried to make up for it.

But Joan was elusive. She refused to be serious and accepted his devotion with an indifference that kept him worried.

They were all to go as far as Naples together. From there Grant was to take the Amalfi Drive for the sake of the old temples at Pastum. Miss Tomlinson and Joan were to go on directly to Rome.

Now they had reached Algiers. One day more beside this one on shore and they would reach Naples. That meant to Grant, if Joan still refused to listen, the end.

He had started out only eleven short days before at peace with himself and the world, happy at the prospect of the six months of travel before him. Now everything was in danger of being upset by the "nice kid."

He looked at her across the table. Savagely he wished she had never grown up. Then he quickly repented remembering the two days still left. He would make the most of them.

He wished there were some way of losing Tomly and her everlasting guides. She had been studying up the situation for days. He imagined her list of places to be visited longer than the hours on shore. He had no intention of trailing around with any of the sightseeing parties. He would sidetrack that idea if possible.

"Miss Tomlinson," he began, "would it interest you to see something seen by very few travelers—not even known about by most?"

"I don't suppose it is really worth seeing if so few people know about it." Miss Tomlinson had finished breakfast and sat uneasily waiting for Joan.

"Hidden away in a church just outside Algiers," continued Grant undaunted, "is a Madonna. It is called the Black Madonna. Sounds curious, doesn't it? If you and Joan would like to see it—"

"What's the name of the church?" asked Miss Tomlinson quickly.

"Let me think," Grant was forced to confess; "just a minute—I've almost got it."

"If you can't remember it, how do you expect to find it?" suspiciously.

"It's a well known name." Then, after a few seconds of deep thought, "I have it—the Notre Dame of the Black Madonna."

"It's not on any list I've seen," Miss Tomlinson was very positive. "It would probably be nothing but a wild goose-chase and end in our missing everything."

"I never heard of a Black Madonna," mused Joan. "It really sounds, Tomly, as though we ought to see it."

"It really sounds like some kind of a joke," replied Miss Tomlinson. "You've probably forgotten, my dear Joan, that this

is Africa—the desert must be just outside the gates—I suppose there are gates. I wouldn't venture beyond those gates for anything."

Grant groaned inwardly, but Joan smiled enigmatically.

"Come, Joan, if you have finished. We have so much before us I don't know how we are going to get it all in." Miss Tomlinson bustled from the table.

"Wait for me at the Notre Dame of the Black Madonna," laughed Joan before following Miss Tomlinson.

"Bet you don't make it"—gloomily.

"Grant," asked Joan suspiciously, "is there really such a thing as this Madonna?"

"I've never seen it, but I've heard of it," with a determined set of the chin, "and I'm going to find out."

"All right, I'll be there," nodded Joan, "notwithstanding Tomly's list which is already several yards long. Cousin Martha would never forgive her if she missed the Royal Palace. Sister Matilda has a leaning toward mosques—had it even as a child. Brother William is already hanging over the front fence in his anxiety to hear what the Botanical Gardens grow not included in his seventeen acres and a half. But I'll see what I can do about squeezing in Notre Dame—even if it is on the edge of the desert."

"You'll find me there waiting," said Grant as Joan hurried off.

II.

As she walked along the deck to her cabin, Joan stopped a minute by the ship's rail watching the small boats dotting the water so far below. Vendors with all sorts of wares were waiting a chance to come aboard.

Suddenly Joan felt a splash on her hand as it rested on the rail. Others quickly followed.

"Rain." She glanced approvingly at the dark clouds gathering overhead.

She felt sure Tomly would never risk sightseeing in the rain. That would give her the chance to go with Grant to see the Black Madonna. Only it would be well not to mention the expedition till her return.

Otherwise Tomly would just sit around and worry about the dangers of the desert or possibly refuse to let her go.

Joan waited to make sure that it had really settled into a rain. Then hurrying to her cabin she threw open the door and—beheld Tomly fully equipped—raincoat, overshoes, umbrella.

"Oh," said Joan, "I thought you would hardly venture ashore in the rain."

"It's only a shower," Miss Tomlinson spoke as though she and the weatherman were confidential friends. "But, my dear Joan, you haven't even started to get ready, and we'll never have time."

"It won't take me a jiff," broke in Joan. "You start on and I'll catch up with you before you get any distance at all."

When Joan reached the deck a few minutes later she found Miss Tomlinson being torn this way and that by the various agents. Each one advocated his trip as the most interesting, instructive, and complete. She was turning from one to the other in utter bewilderment.

"It's easy to settle." Joan came quickly to the rescue. "We'll take the one that includes the Black Madonna."

Miss Tomlinson lowered her voice as if it were something not to be mentioned out loud. "No one has spoken of it. We'll select this one as being the most complete." She quickly handed the price of the trip to the agent standing nearest her.

She and Joan followed the guide into one of the small boats and were soon being rowed toward shore.

"Don't know how long I can stand this wholesale sightseeing," mused Joan. Then she looked at Miss Tomlinson and repented.

They were passing a large ship at anchor. Some one had remarked that she was the Cambria on her way back to America. Miss Tomlinson fixed her eyes on the huge ship with unmistakable longing. Joan caught her wiping away a furtive tear when she thought no one was looking.

"Poor old homesick Tomly." Joan felt a wave of pity for the little lady so far from the home she had never left before.

As they reached the shore the weather suddenly cleared. The sun came out bright and warm.

Miss Tomlinson and Joan attached themselves to a large excited curious mob. They all got in carriages and were soon being rushed madly from one point of interest to another.

Joan and her family had always avoided "tours." They had roamed about independently, seeing the things that appealed to them regardless of those prescribed as desirable.

As she drove from one place to another Joan became increasingly rebellious. The city was swarming with sightseers.

"They must be passengers from the other ship," she decided once when their way was blocked by a cross-current of tourists equally averse to giving ground.

She began to wonder how she was going to manage about getting out to Notre Dame of the Black Madonna. She had to curb an impulse to take Tomly by the arm and run off with her.

At last the carriages were left behind, and they started on their trip through the Arab Quarter. This was more to Joan's liking. In spite of being personally conducted she began to enjoy herself.

"I got a fine snap at that veiled woman in the corner back there—did you see her?" she asked eagerly.

Miss Tomlinson shivered. "I don't see why you wanted to take her picture—she was a perfect bundle of rags."

"Wait a minute, please," begged Joan. "That was my last picture. I've got to put in a new film."

Miss Tomlinson was loath to stop, but before she had time to protest Joan had filled her hands with things to hold.

"Here's my camera case, and my umbrella; and, wait a minute—now I've got it—this old roll that I've just finished. I can't reload without both hands free."

Joan took a new film from her pocket. She spoke rapidly while getting it in place.

"Don't you think, Tomly, we might have a try at hunting up that Black Madonna? I mean, of course, after we've finished this trip. We must be most through now and we've still plenty of time."

"My dear child"—Miss Tomlinson trembled at the mere suggestion—"I would no more think of venturing out on the

African desert alone with you than I would of—of—walking into a den of lions. Besides, I am firmly convinced that there is no such thing."

"All right," which did not mean that Joan had given up the idea of going, but had postponed it to a more propitious time.

III.

SHE began to collect her belongings from Miss Tomlinson. "Anyway, I'm glad the sun is shining. It gives me such a dandy chance to take pictures and—"

A sudden terrified gasp made her look up. She glanced quickly toward her companion.

Miss Tomlinson had turned and was pointing down the steps with a shaking hand.

They were on one of the narrow crooked streets or alleys. It was no more than a succession of worn stone steps leading gradually down the face of the cliff to which much of the city clung.

Looking anxiously along the street, Joan saw only the steps—the low windowless houses on either side—and a number of natives coming and going unconcernedly.

"What is it?" she demanded curiously. "You look, Tomly, as though you were seeing ghosts."

"They've gone. We're lost." The little lady looked ready to faint.

"Oh, the rest of the crowd," laughed Joan. "That's easy. We catch up to them around the next corner."

She felt her arm clutched nervously as Miss Tomlinson began dragging her frantically down the steps.

Visions of a strange and direful fate flitted through Miss Tomlinson's mind as she raced Joan toward the corner. Here the street ended in one running at right angles.

The trip seemed endless to the nervous little lady. At last with breath coming in gasps and eyes wide open in their eagerness, she looked up the street. No familiar group of tourists was to be seen. She turned quickly, looked down the street and saw two or three natives shambling along.

"It wouldn't be so terrible if it was any—"

where but Algiers—such a foreign, out-of-the-way place,” she groaned.

“I love it,” laughed Joan. “Now we can ramble along and see what we please—who knows but what the Black Madonna—”

“Ramble along!” Miss Tomlinson was on the verge of tears. “You—you—don’t understand. We’re lost—here—in Algiers. We don’t speak a word of the language. They won’t understand anything we ask them.”

“Just try it with a silvery accompaniment, and see how quickly they’ll learn,” grinned Joan.

“Besides I’m responsible to your father. If anything should happen—he—”

“Why it’s what I’m used to having happen,” began Joan. Then noticing how pale Miss Tomlinson had grown and how she was trembling she grew instantly sympathetic.

“It’s perfectly all right.” She patted the older woman confidently on the arm. “All we have to do is to keep on. We’re bound to run into a party sooner or later. Remember there are two big liners—perhaps more—turned loose in this city. We couldn’t miss them all if we tried.”

“But how can we tell which way to go—and we’re losing valuable time—and, what if the ship should sail without us—and your father will never forgive me?” wailed Miss Tomlinson as she took a few steps down, changed her mind and took as many up, then came back and stood shaking with nervous fear at Joan’s side.

“Why, we’ll go down the steps of course.” Joan took the lead followed by Miss Tomlinson as quickly as her trembling legs would let her. “The Mediterranean isn’t on top of the hill unless it’s climbed there since we left. And the ship is not sailing till two o’clock, so you can eliminate that worry. What will we do with the rest of the morning?”

“If we ever get within sight of it again, we’ll go right out and stay on the ship till she sails.” In her eagerness to reach it Miss Tomlinson forged ahead.

As they continued on down Joan roamed carelessly from side to side of the narrow street examining things of interest. But Miss Tomlinson, in her anxiety to read what

lay beyond, kept her eyes glued to the turn ahead.

Three minutes later she made the turn. “Joan—” She glanced back. Then she stood rooted to the spot unable to take another step. Her breath came in gasps. She put a trembling hand to stop the wild beating of her heart.

There, not one hundred yards below, was a sunny open square. It was filled with people. Beyond it stretched the blue waters of the sea with the big ships riding lazily at anchor, while the smaller ones flitted busily about.

But Joan! Joan was nowhere to be seen! She had entirely disappeared from the face of Algiers!

Miss Tomlinson stood a few minutes dazed. She couldn’t think, or speak, or move. At last, with hand still pressed against her heart, she took the few steps between her and an approaching native.

“Have you seen anything of a young girl—an American?” It sounded like a strange voice that accosted so boldly the Arab as he shuffled past her.

Without even a glance in her direction he kept on his way.

Miss Tomlinson’s knees suddenly gave way and she sank down on the step. She put a shaking hand over her eyes to shut out the rows of dingy white buildings. With their single door, usually open, they looked to her feverish imagination eager to devour whoever might come too near.

This picture slowly fading, she saw in its place a quiet village street shaded by elms. The white house shone as if freshly painted, well kept velvety lawns stretched in front of them. There was a look of security and peace over all.

She lost all track of time. The five minutes might have been as many hours. Then at last she became conscious of a voice somewhere behind her. It sounded gay and familiar.

“Too tired, Tomly, to go back up the street a way?”

The voice sounded like Joan’s. Was it Joan restored to her in some miraculous way after being lost in the heart of the Arab Quarter? She lowered her hand from her burning eyes and looked around.

"Tomly—why, Tomly—what is it?" Joan sank quickly to the step beside the quivering figure.

Tremblingly Miss Tomlinson explained, "I couldn't see you anywhere. It was as if some dingy house had swallowed you up. I didn't know what to do next."

"I am sorry," replied Joan penitently. "There was a school back there. I stepped inside the doorway to hear the little children studying out loud, all at one and the same time. It was so curious I forgot everything else."

"If we ever get back to the ship in safety, I feel I never want to leave it again till we get back to America," wailed Miss Tomlinson, as Joan helped her to her feet.

"Then I don't suppose there is much chance of your feeling like hunting up that Notre Dame of the Black Madonna?" Joan was not easily discouraged, but she began to wonder if after all she would be able to manage the little lady who still trembled as she helped her down the steps.

Miss Tomlinson soon made it quite plain that there was not the slightest chance; that there had never been and there never would be.

A few minutes later they reached the sunny open square. Miss Tomlinson breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief on seeing a party of tourists crossing briskly toward the quay.

"Hurry," she commanded Joan. "We must overtake them before they reach the dock."

"We still have most of the morning left—besides it's not the same party we started out with," objected Joan.

"That doesn't matter if only they're returning to the ship," insisted the little lady.

"Why can't I stay on shore while you return? I'll be very careful—and be sure to be back before sailing time—"

The horror on Miss Tomlinson's face caused Joan to break off abruptly.

"You don't understand." Joan patted the arm she was still holding. "You really are just as safe here as you would be in Greenville Center—perhaps safer—though it all seems strange and unreal. Dad says so much money comes in from the tourists, the natives wouldn't let anything happen to

one of us for anything in the world. Don't you see?"

But Miss Tomlinson was in no condition to see. And she had had enough—more than enough. So they followed closely after the party of returning passengers.

When they were finally on board the little boat that was to carry them to the steamer, Miss Tomlinson sank down and sat with her eyes closed, completely exhausted after her strenuous morning.

Joan remained very quiet. She quickly averted her eyes from those of the other passengers when they glanced in her direction. If they were disposed to be friendly they received no encouragement.

At last the steamer was reached. As they ran alongside Joan noticed an air of bustle and excitement. Miss Tomlinson opened tired eyes that lighted up with quick relief at the sight of the huge black bulk towering above them.

She was the first on the stairs leading to the deck above. Joan stepped politely aside to let the other passengers follow. Then, instead of joining them, she took her seat again in the little boat.

She gave a quick glance upward toward the deck so far above. No one could be seen. Turning to the sailor who seemed in command she said simply:

"I wish to return."

IV.

IN another minute the little boat had swung free from the big one and was making rapid progress toward shore.

Joan did not glance back, but sat with eyes fixed on the swiftly approaching quay.

As they reached the dock she dropped a generous tip into the outstretched hand of the sailor, and scrambled eagerly ashore.

She hailed one of the nearby drivers. After giving quick directions she climbed into the ancient equipage and settled back with a tremulous sigh.

As they were leaving the waterfront she glanced back at the ship she had just left. Slowly and majestically she was making her way out of the harbor.

Joan shuddered—then laughed uncertainly.

It was not really a long ride, but it seemed rather endless to Joan. She was experiencing unexpected difficulty in managing her thoughts.

"I hope Grant will be there. If he isn't—I suppose I can come back the same way I'm going. But I do hope he's there. It would be sort of lonely—but I won't think about it—I won't—I won't—I won't!"

She set her lips determinedly together and—continued to think.

"If we were headed in that direction it seems as if we might almost have reached the Cape of Good Hope by this time," concluded Joan, when at last the church became a reality and not a bit of the distant landscape.

She leaned forward trying to catch a glimpse of another carriage. No—yes—there was one drawn up at the side of the road.

As Grant detached himself from the vehicle and came toward her she uttered a deep sigh of relief.

"Where's friend Tomly?" Grant glanced curiously into the depths of the empty carriage. "You don't mean to say she was angelic enough to let you come alone?"

Joan shook her head. "She didn't let. I just came."

"Wait a shake while I dismiss my driver. His poor old nag has had a long enough rest. We can both go back in your coach and four."

As soon as this was accomplished, Joan and he started toward the open door of the church.

"We haven't a lot of time to spare." He glanced at his watch.

"Is she very interesting—I mean the Madonna?" asked Joan.

"Haven't seen her."

"What have you been doing all these hours and hours?" It seemed a lifetime to Joan since she had left the steamer that morning.

"Dreaming. I say, Joan"—he stopped her outside the door while he continued all in one breath—"it occurred to me that—I say—why couldn't we be married along the way—say at Naples? Why wait till we get back to New York? This way we'd

eliminate the bother and fuss of a big formal wedding—the kind one's family always wishes on one to prove to those present that you're not ashamed of the chap you're marrying."

Joan looked thoughtfully at the gray stone building before her. Perhaps the Madonna inside might give advice—even a Black Madonna—

"It's a lot better idea than just getting engaged, isn't it—only—what can we do with Tomly?"

"I've already done it—" began Joan, then stopped and uttered a cry of consternation.

"What is it?" Grant glanced quickly in the direction of Joan's fixed gaze. "For the love of Mike!" He dashed madly into the road. Shouting frantically he raced along the dusty highway in the direction of the city.

Without losing more than a second, Joan followed.

While Grant had been talking, Joan's glance had strayed toward the road. There she saw the two drivers in heated conversation, if she could judge by the violent gesticulations.

Suddenly Grant's driver had started off, followed immediately by her driver.

Joan was tall and slight, but she was no match for Grant. It was not long before he had come within hailing distance of the second driver.

When Joan came up hot and breathless, he turned toward her after a brief talk with the apologetic owner of the carriage.

"As far as I can make out he pretends he was only going to drive under the trees and wait for us in the shade," he explained. "Perhaps he was, but I would not trust him. The other rascal, mad at being dismissed, was at the bottom of it, I bet."

"Home, James!" murmured Joan, climbing quickly into the carriage.

"But the Black Madonna?" said Grant.

"You go on in while I keep tabs on this heathen," laughed Joan.

But Grant shook his head emphatically. "How could you stop him if he decided to continue on his way? You go and I'll wait."

Joan was equally firm.

"Do you suppose it would be any pleasure for me to see her if you don't?"

"Then what are we going to do?" in a puzzled voice. "If we both go in and James takes another notion to drive off without us, we'd certainly miss the steamer."

"The meeting will just have to be postponed till our next trip," replied Joan thoughtfully.

After giving the driver directions to take them to the steamer as quickly as possible, Grant beamed on Joan as he settled himself comfortably by her side.

"Our next trip," he echoed. "That certainly sounds good to me. The only speck on an otherwise cloudless horizon—is Tomly."

"Even as a speck on the horizon, Tomly no longer exists," admitted Joan slowly.

"What do you mean?" asked Grant quickly.

"Tomly's seasickness was mostly homesickness," explained Joan. "Night after night she lay awake wondering if Matilda had watered the geraniums and Cousin Martha had fed the cat and Brother

William the chickens. Then she would cry herself to sleep. Poor old Greenville Center-sick Tomly."

"But how does all this get us anywhere?" asked Grant impatiently.

"It's just a—well, a sort of apology—for what I've done," continued Joan. "You see, Tomly thought we were lost in the Arab Quarter this morning. On reaching the quay a few minutes later she was still so upset she insisted on returning immediately to the steamer. I took her out to a steamer, returned, hailed a driver, and here we are."

"I still fail to see."

"So did Tomly. But I saw right away. The name on the sailors' caps was Cambria and not the George Washington."

"You don't mean?"—

Joan slowly nodded.

"Tomly is now steaming as fast as the Cambria will take her toward America, her beloved Greenville Center, her cat, her chickens and her geraniums."

"Joan, you're an angel!" said Grant.

"Wonder if Tomly thinks so, too?" murmured Joan wistfully.



THE GAME

FATE, the gambler, has dealt me a hand

And set me down to play—I know no rules,

I scarcely know the value of the cards!

Here's one marked "Fortune"—but how is it played?

And here is one marked "Love"—when shall I lead?

And this, marked "Failure"—how shall I discard?

This one reads "Fame"—is it the master card?

"—Fate," I cry, "you drew me in the game—

I pray you now, come stand here at my side

And show me how to play—I do not know

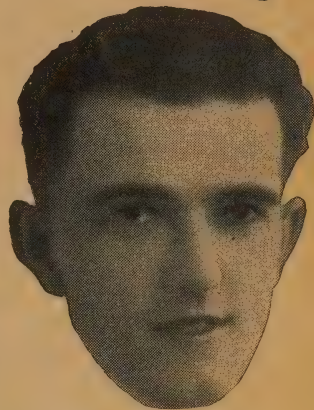
The Game of Life!" Fate laughs—but does not stir,

And from her place calls out "Your play!"

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.

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bringing thousands
in profits to our men*



Read it again! In spare time! Can you blame him, then, for deciding to devote all of his time to handling this remarkable proposition? Man—these products actually sell themselves! Men—and women, too—jump at the opportunity to give you their order. They need the product—**absolutely need it**—and you show them how you save them real money by ordering from you. And the best part of it is—they come back to you for more. You build your business as you sell—a sure, clean, permanent, well-paying business that brings you profits every day of the year.

Make \$200 a Week Easy

You can do it! It doesn't take experience or training! It takes the **will to sell**! E. C. Shurt of Wisconsin, one of our representatives writes "It doesn't take a salesman to sell your goods! People want it! I took it up as side line first—and in a short time got 300 orders. From now on it's going to be my main line." J. H. Crockwell of Wyoming, another of our many enthusiastic representatives, advises us, "In 50 days I made over \$600.00 profit." Thos. E. Hally who has been with us but a short time says, "I have worked only in spare hours—yet in five days made \$57.01." Not bad—\$11.40 a day for spare time work. Hundreds of our representatives are turning their spare hours into dollars—and those who will devote all their time can easily earn from \$150 to \$200 a week.

Sample Kits Sent You Free No deposits — No outfit to buy — No red tape

You invest absolutely nothing! Everything you need—including samples—sent you **FREE**. And remember these samples sell the goods on sight! It will surprise you—how easily this product is sold—and the profits you make will amaze you! Make up your mind right now that you are going to get into this live wire game. Determine to get into the big money class—for this is a big money proposition. And don't forget that every one you sell—remains a customer. Build a business for yourself that brings you wonderful results!

Mail Coupon Quick

You must act quickly! Begin to make your share of these enormous profits without further delay. There is real two-fisted, he-man's money in it for you—and if you are anxious to get into the big money class—eager to build a permanent income—then send for full information regarding this new plan of making real money. The coupon brings you all details on how quickly you can jump to magnificent earnings.

TAYLOR, WELLS & COMPANY
Dept. 45, 2740-44 N. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Taylor, Wells & Co.,
Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen:

Perhaps it might interest you to know the amount of business that I have done since I started and how well pleased I am with the results.

I am employed during the day and devote only my spare moments to selling your product. In less than four months of spare time selling my gross sales were \$5,707.00, on which my profits amounted to \$1,141.40 (\$71.00 a week.)

This I consider so good that I'm going to devote all my time to your interests—as I know that your products are needed. I can again sell those whom I've already sold—and at the same time make many new customers. I'm going out for a record and I'm going to clean up the biggest money I ever made in my life.

I feel now that I am independent of any boss—and that every dollar I make is my own. I'm being honest with my customers and I have found it the basis of success.

With best wishes, I am

Arthur F. Kniepe.

TAYLOR, WELLS & CO.

Dept. 45, 2740-44 N. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Kindly send me full details of your new sales plan and information regarding your product. It is understood that this will place me under no obligation whatever.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

COLGATE'S

"HANDY GRIP"
REFILL SHAVING SOAP

The Refill Shaving Stick



Like Renewing a Battery in a Flashlight

PUTTING a "Refill" into Colgate's "Handy Grip" is easy and simple. The soap itself is threaded to screw into the socket.

Moisten the bit removed from the "Handy Grip" and stick it upon the end of the "Refill." There is no waste.

The metal "Handy Grip," containing a trial size stick of Colgate's Shaving Soap, sent for 10c. When the trial stick is used up you can buy the Colgate "Refills" threaded to fit this Grip. Thus you save 10c. on each "Refill" you buy. There are 350 shaves in a Colgate Shaving Stick—double the number you can get from a tube of cream at the same price.

As we make stick, powder, and cream for shaving, we can give you this impartial advice: The stick is the most economical form of shaving soap. But if you are a shaving cream devotee, you have a new satisfaction to experience. Colgate's Rapid-Shave Cream, one of our latest products, is truly wonderful! You can't imagine until you have tried it how good a shaving cream can be.

COLGATE & CO.
Dept. C

199 Fulton Street, New York

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

MODEST STEEL

WARNING!

The rustlers who have been working on the Bosque Grand cattle are known.

Six are to leave Lannon Basin at once, to stay forever.

The six are Campan, Bannack, Tulerosa, Devake, Slim Lally and one other.

The man who takes this notice down will be considered the "one other"
I'm shooting on sight.

- LANNON



A Serial
in Six Shots

Brass Commandments

by Charles Alden Seltzer

10¢ PER

MAY 20

BY THE \$4.00

*"B.V.D." Underwear is Identified by This
Red Woven Label*

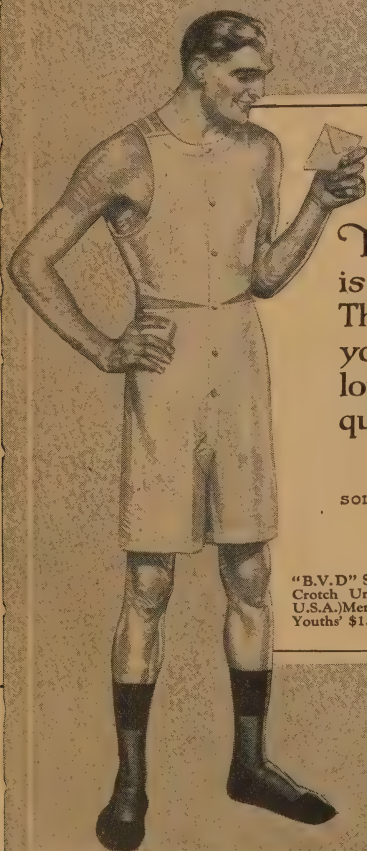
MADE FOR THE

B.V.D.

BEST RETAIL TRADE

(Trade Mark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. and Foreign Countries)

No Underwear is "B.V.D." Without It



The "B.V.D." Red Woven Label
is the Trade Mark by which
The B.V.D. Company assures
you the far-famed comfort,
long wear and dependable
quality of its product,

The B.V.D. Company
New York

SOLE MANUFACTURERS OF "B.V.D." UNDERWEAR

"B.V.D." Sleeveless Closed
Crotch Union Suits (Pat.
U.S.A.) Men's \$1.50 the suit,
Youths' \$1.00 the suit.



"B.V.D." Coat Cut Under-
shirts and Knee Length
Drawers, 85c the garment.



**FREE
5-DAY
TRIAL**

**SAVE
HALF**

**New—
Not
Rebuilt**



Not a Single Penny in Advance!

Test This Wonderful New Oliver Nine (1922 Model) FREE!

THE price offer we make on the new 1922 Model OLIVER NINE is so amazingly low that you will hardly believe it possible. You'll say that it is unbelievable that a standard typewriter, *the finest built*, can be sold at this price.

To convince you, we will ship you a new (1922 Model) OLIVER NINE, direct from the factory, to your home, or office, and *we leave it to you to be the judge of its merits.*

New Low Price Savings

Don't send a single penny. NOT A CENT! Just mail the coupon.

Get our amazing FREE 5-DAY TRIAL OFFER. We ship you an OLIVER for you to test it. See for yourself if it isn't the best typewriter at any price.

And when actual test and experience, from personal use, have proved to you the immense superiority of the OLIVER, then you can pay for it, a little each month, with more than a year to pay for it while you are using it, while it is paying for itself.

Easy Payment Plan

The small monthly payments are about what you would have to pay for typewriter rentals. Yet in a few months the machine will have been paid for—your property. "How can you do it?" people write and ask us.

We do it by cutting out all the expensive, old fashioned methods of selling typewriters through branch houses, agents, salesmen, etc., a method that is responsible for the high price of typewriters. We sell direct—to YOU, to everybody.

Over 950,000 Sold!

Hundreds of thousands of individuals and firms have appreciated this better typewriter at a lower price. Great concerns like the New York Central Lines; the New York Edison Co., Morris & Co., the big packers; Hart, Schaffner & Marx; National Cloak & Suit Co., and many others of this caliber, use OLIVERS—not because they are the lowest in price by half, but because they are the BEST AT ANY PRICE.

We offer—mind you—not a rebuilt, second-hand, or used typewriter. We offer you, on FREE 5-DAY

TRIAL, the new 1922 model OLIVER NINE—with scores of improvements and refinements—an improvement on the OLIVER that formerly sold for \$100, or more, like other standard typewriters.

An Improved Oliver Nine

The 1922 model OLIVER NINE has greater speed, lighter touch, is practically noiseless, and is in every way superior to the old OLIVER that sold for \$100.

We could tell you how durable it is, how economical; how it is always in service, never shirking, never out of repair. We could tell you volumes about its qualities, but we prefer that you discover these advantages yourself. So we ask YOU to be the JUDGE.

And when you have tried it on our liberal 5-DAY FREE TRIAL plan, and convinced yourself that there is no typewriter as good, at any price, then you can pay for it at your convenience, on easy, small monthly installments, with over a year to pay. Only a few cents a day.

Just Mail the Coupon Today

Mail the FREE TRIAL OFFER COUPON.

Do it today—NOW—before it slips your mind. We will then mail you, by return post, our complete OFFER, beautiful art catalog and a sensational exposure explaining why we can make you this very low price on the OLIVER, entitled "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

Remember, asking for this puts you under no obligation. Sending for the OLIVER NINE puts you under no obligation. If, after 5-DAY FREE TRIAL you are not satisfied, you can return it at our expense. All we ask is that you TRY IT.

**FREE
TRIAL
COUPON
USE
IT**

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY

735 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

The Oliver Typewriter Company

735 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me without the slightest obligation on my part your special free trial offer, illustrated art catalog and the booklet "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

ARGOSY-WEEKLY

VOL. CXLII

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NUMBER 6

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MIGHTY few authors know enough about the Indians of to-day to write of them authentically and realistically. Most Indian stories, therefore, aren't much to talk about. But when an author knows his people as well as

RICHARD BARRY

knows the Crees who figure in his new serial,

"THE UNCONQUERED SAVAGE,"

the result is a tale of adventure that combines the thrills and interest of Fenimore Cooper with the modern romance of life in the mountains of the Northwest. Don't miss the first installment of "THE UNCONQUERED SAVAGE" next week!

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

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PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1922

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

Wonderful Clay Brings New Beauty to Every Skin!

Almost at once the complexion becomes clear and beautiful through this amazing scientific discovery.

SCIENCE is giving new complexions for old through a marvelous new discovery! Dull, coarse, blemished skins are being transformed into exquisite softness and smoothness—almost at once. Years of scientific research and experiment have finally revealed the elements which, when combined in certain exact proportions, remove the dead scales on the surface of the skin, clear the pores of every impurity, and leave the complexion as clear and charming as a child's.

The skin is provided by nature with millions of tiny pores with which to expel acids and impurities. When dust bores deeply into these pores, the impurities remain in the skin. The result is not always noticeable at first. But soon the complexion becomes dull and harsh. Suddenly the face "breaks out" in pimples and blackheads. And if the impurities are still allowed to remain, the complexion becomes ruined entirely.

The New Discovery Explained

Certain elements, when correctly combined according to a chemist's formula, have been found to possess a powerful potency. These elements, or ingredients, have been blended into a soft, plastic, cream-like clay, delicately scented. It is applied to the face with the finger tips—just as a cream would be applied.

The name given to this wonderful discovery is Domino Complexion Clay. The moment it is applied, every one of the millions of tiny pores in the skin awaken and hungrily absorb the nourishing skin-foods. In a few minutes the clay dries and hardens, and there is a cool, tingling pleasant sensation as the powerful clay draws out every skin impurity. You will actually feel the tiny pores breathing, relaxing, freeing themselves with relief from the impurities that clogged and stifled them.

Allow Domino Complexion Clay to remain for a little while. You may read, or sew, or go about your household duties. All the while you will feel the powerful beauty clay doing its work, gently drawing out impurities and absorbing blemishes. A warm tingle will soften the clay, and you will be able to roll it off easily with your fingers. And with it you will roll off every scale of dead skin, every harmful impurity, every blemish. A hidden beauty will be unmasked—beneath the old complexion will be revealed a new one with all the soft, smooth texture and delicate coloring of youth!

Special Free Examination Offer

In order to enable everyone to test this wonderful new preparation, we are making a very special free-examination offer. If you send in your application now a jar of Domino Complexion Clay will be sent to you at once, freshly compounded and direct from the Domino House. Although it is a \$3.50 product and will cost that much ordinarily, you may pay the postman only \$1.95 (plus a few cents postage) in full payment. And despite this special low introductory price you have the guaranteed privilege of returning the jar and having your money refunded at once if you are not delighted with results.

Our Guarantee Backed by Million-Dollar Bank

We guarantee Domino Complexion Clay to be a preparation of marvelous potency—and a beautifier that is absolutely harmless to the most sensitive skin. This guarantee of satisfaction to every user is backed by a de-



posit of \$10,000 in the State Bank of Philadelphia, which insures the return to any purchaser of the total amount paid for Domino Complexion Clay if the results are unsatisfactory or if our statements in this announcement in any way misrepresent this wonderful new discovery.

Mail the Coupon NOW!

Don't fail to take advantage of this free-to-your-door introductory price offer. No matter what the condition of your complexion may be, Domino Complexion Clay will give it a new radiant beauty—for it is a natural preparation and works *always*. You won't have to wait for results, either. They are immediately evident.

Just mail the coupon—no money. Test for yourself this remarkable new discovery that actually lifts away blemishes and reveals a charming, beautiful new complexion. Don't delay. Clip and mail the coupon now. Domino House, Dept. 435, 269 South 9th St., Philadelphia.

DOMINO HOUSE, Dept. 435

269 South 9th Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Without money in advance, you may send me a full-size \$3.50 jar of Domino Complexion Clay. When it is in my hands I will pay the postman only \$1.95 (plus few cents postage) in full payment. I retain the privilege of returning the jar within 10 days and having my money refunded if I am not surprised and pleased with the wonderful results. I am to be sole judge.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

If you wish, you may send money with coupon.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WHIRLWIND MONEY-MAKER FOR AGENTS—sample free. Sell powdered Hanslick, an absolutely new, non-competitive, and unbeatable hand cleanser. Removes grease, grime, ink, paint, etc., without slightest injury to skin. Its use spreads like wildfire. Cheaper than all others. Sells in cans (or bulk with dispensers) to garages, autoists, mechanics, factory and office folks, to housewives, hardware stores and to auto supply houses. Huge quantities used weekly by mercantile houses. (Names on request.) Big repeat business assured. Exclusive agencies, crews working for you, fast sales, splendid profits and a permanent business for hustlers. Live ones can clean up \$500 a month. Send 26 stamp for postage on Free sample. Complete sales plan goes with it. Write quick to Solar Products Co., R. 301, 124 W. Lake Street, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS SOMETHING NEW, FIRST POPULAR PRICED FIRE EXTINGUISHER ever made. Every home, garage or car owner needs one. Demand enormous. Over 10,000 ordered by our Territory Salesmen. No experience or capital needed. All you do is take orders. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Write for territory. **THURSTON MANUFACTURING CO.**, 406 Foe Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS! 1922's GREATEST SENSATION. 11 piece toilet article set selling like blazes at \$1.75 with \$1.00 dressmaker's shears free to each customer. Line up with Davis for 1922. E. M. Davis Co., Dept. 58, Chicago.

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—\$75.00 to \$150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. Mr. Al. R. Alton, Sales-Manager, Lock Box 483, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN—Make sparkling glass name plates, numbers, checkerboards, medallions, signs; big illustrated book FREE. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, O.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

WE PAY \$50 A WEEK TAKING ORDERS FOR INSIDE TYRES inner armor for automobile tires. Guaranteed to give double tire mileage. Any tire. Prevents punctures and blow-outs. Big demand. Low priced. Write quick for territory. **AMERICAN ACCESSORIES CO.**, B301, Cincinnati, Ohio.

\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. Y, Fairfield, Iowa.

Big Profits. Sell handsome Windshield Wings, Mirrors, Spot Lights, guaranteed Tires, Tubes, etc. Prices that win. Car owners, dealers buy one to gross. Write for booklet and sensational agency prices. Rapid Sales Corp'n, 20-D, Grand Rapids, Mich.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

MEN—WOMEN. Enormous Profits. \$25 to \$100 daily wholesale or retail. Manufacturing Polar Bars. Chocolate Coated Ice Cream Novelty. 10c package costs 3c to make. Sensational seller. Complete outfit \$17.50. **INTERNATIONAL CHOCOLATE CO.**, 213 S. Wabash Avenue, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

AMBITIOUS WRITERS, send today for Free copy, America's leading magazine for writers of photoplays, stories, poems, songs. Instructive, helpful. **WRITER'S DIGEST**, 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit MSS., or write Literature Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LAND SEEKERS! Opportunity awaits you near hustling city in Michigan. 20, 40, 80 acre tracts. Only \$15 to \$35 per acre. Very easy terms. Write today for FREE booklet. **SWIGART LAND CO.**, Y-1245, First National Bank Building, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR \$5—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. **UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP.**, 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; desire sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Walnwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

DELICIOUS DRINKS in powder. Just add cold water and sugar. **Orangeade, Cherry-Julep**, etc. Fine for Home, Parties, Dances, Entertainments, etc. **AGENTS WANTED.** 85c Clear profit on each dollar selling by the glass. Send time for 10 glass pkg., best drink you ever tasted, and partic. postpaid. 7 kinds 50c. **MORRISSEY CO.**, 4417-30 Madison St., Chicago.

AGENTS—EARN \$50 TO \$100 A WEEK SELLING MARQUETTE TIRE TOOL. Simple demonstration sells it. Removes tires in a jiffy. Every owner wants it. Thousands in use. Exclusive territory going fast. Agent's sample \$1.25, in detail at \$2.50. Write for full particulars or send \$1.25 for sample and particulars. **MARQUETTE MFG. CO.**, Dept. E, 213 S. Wabasha Avenue, St. Paul, Minn.

\$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular \$25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make \$35.00 to \$40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. **SPENCER MEAD COMPANY**, Dept. E-204, Chicago.

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. \$100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. **HOLMES RUBBER CO.**, 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. **Acme Letter Co.**, 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

AGENTS—BIG MONEY—\$8 to \$16 a day. Aluminum handle cutlery set. Brand new. You display and take orders. We deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Sample free. Try it out. **JENNINGS MFG. CO.**, Dept. 1609, Dayton, Ohio.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. **Madison Mills**, 503 Broadway, New York.

\$50,000 "PROFITS IN PORTRAITS" explains in Free Circular. 24 hour service Prints, Portraits, Frames. Samples Free. **PICTURE MAN FRIEDMAN**, Dept. A, 127 N. Dearborn, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge \$1.50, make \$1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. **American Monogram Co.**, Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. **Collette Manufacturing Company**, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

Responsible firm offers big opportunity; wonderful invention; plumbing unnecessary; thousands enthusiastic users; representative wanted; exclusive territory; experience unnecessary; free sales helps. Write today. **ROBINSON HOUSEHOLD MFG. CO.**, Dept. A-6, Factories Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. **W. Hillyer Ragsdale**, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

HELP WANTED

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. **CBS**, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

Make Money At Home. You can earn from \$1 to \$2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple "Instructograph" method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. **American Show Card School**, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.

WANTED—MEN—BOYS OVER 17. Become Railway Mail Clerks. Commence \$133 month. Common education sufficient. List positions free. Write immediately. **FRANKLIN INSTITUTE**, Dept. E-1, Rochester, N. Y.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

ALL MEN—WOMEN OVER 17, willing to accept Government Positions \$135 (Traveling or Stationary) write **MR. OZMENT**, 198, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! \$110 to \$250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored). \$140—\$200. Experience unnecessary. **836 RAILWAY BUREAU**, East St. Louis, Ill.

GAMES AND ENTERTAINMENTS

Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel choruses, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. **T. S. Denison & Co.**, 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.



“Another \$50 Raise!”

“WHY, that’s my third increase in a year! It just shows what special training will do for a man. When I left school to go to work I couldn’t do anything in particular. All I could hope for was just a job—and that’s what I got, at \$60 a month for routine, unskilled work. I stayed at it for three years, with one small increase each year.

“Then one day I woke up. I found I wasn’t getting ahead simply because I couldn’t do any one thing well. I decided right then to put in an hour after supper each night preparing myself for more important work. So I wrote to Scranton and arranged for a course that would give me special training for our business.

“Why, in a few months I had a whole new vision of my work and its possibilities. You see, I was just beginning to really understand it. I made some suggestions to the manager and he was immensely pleased. Said he had noticed how much better I was doing lately and wished he had more like me.

“Just after that an opening came and he gave me my chance—at an increase of \$25 a month. Then I really began to grow. Six months later I was put in charge of my department and my salary went up again. Since then I’ve had two increases of \$50 a month and now I’ve got another \$50 raise!”

For 30 years the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men and women everywhere to win promotion, to earn more money, to have happy, prosperous homes, to know the joy of getting ahead in business and in life.

More than two million have taken the up road with I. C. S. help. More than 130,000 are now turning their spare time to profit. Hundreds are starting every day. Isn’t it about time for *you* to find out what the I. C. S. can do for you?

Here is all we ask—the chance to prove it—without obligation on your part or a penny of cost. Just mark and mail the coupon printed below and full particulars will come to you by return mail.

----- TEAR OUT HERE -----
INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2139-C SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation, please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

- | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting & Railways | <input type="checkbox"/> SALESMANSHIP |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring | <input type="checkbox"/> ADVERTISING |
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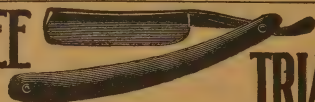
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NUMBER 6

Brass Commandments

Part I

by

Charles Alden
Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.



CHAPTER I.

FLASH LANNON COMES HOME.

FIRST he saw the shipping pens, then the runways and the corrals. Afterward, somberly, he stared at Bozzam City, and thought the cattle pens more attractive.

For Stephen Lannon was in no pleasant mood. His home-coming was a sacrifice to what he considered his duty. He would much rather have stayed East, but his coming had been made mandatory because of a telegram he had received from his foreman, Tom Yates, bearing the brief message: "Come home immediately."

He had answered the foreman's telegram from New York, advising that he would reach Bozzam City the following Thursday, and instructing Yates to have Ben Perrin meet him at Bozzam City with the

buckboard. He had arrived a day ahead of time, with no expectation of seeing Ben Perrin, unless he decided to hire a horse and go to the Bosque Grand.

He stood motionless on the station platform after the train had steamed away, his soul seared with contempt and derision as he stared at Bozzam City's ugly shanties. Bozzam City at this minute seemed as diverting as a pile of bleached bones in a desert. He knew it as well as he knew his own name. He might have left it only yesterday for all the changes that time had made in it. In five years not one new building had been erected. More stale than the dead, dry dust that covered it, it seemed to exude foulness. It stretched its loathsome length beside the railroad tracks like some repellent monster, the grimy windows of its shacks staring with sinister steadiness into the white sunlight.

He turned from the town, dropped his traveling bag to the platform beside him, and gazed around him at the valley—"Lannon Basin"—named after his family. Sixty miles eastward the gleaming rails over which he had traveled entered the valley; seventy miles westward the train that had brought him would have to travel before it reached the first low range of hills in that direction.

There had come no change in the valley; it was as he had left it five years ago. Nature's face was unaltered. The thirty miles of wilderness that stretched northward to the serrated hills that thrust their peaks into the serene blue of the sky still seemed so close that they appeared to nod to him. The brilliant sunshine that poured down upon him was the same as when he had stood on the station platform five years before, waiting for the train that was to take him eastward to new scenes and into a new life. Salient features of the land were the same then as now. Minaret, bastioned tower and cathedral spire loomed high above virile, bright green grass; dead lava beds and frequent stretches of white, dry sand were as familiar to him as the bold summits of the Capitans, southward, their bases submerged in a blue, tenuous haze. Trails, dim or unseen by the unpracticed eye, were so flagrantly visible to him that they seemed wide as wagon roads.

He stared into the far reaches of the valley, southward, reminiscent, his gaze saturnine. This was the land of his youth; the valley which had been his domain by virtue of a ruthless will and a cleverness with the six-shooter that had effectually discouraged encroachment. Again, in memory, he rode Polestar into the yawning gulf of distance, over the grass plains, across the desert stretches, into the hills, while the *sahuario* nodded to him in friendly fashion, the *tinajas* tinkled soft welcomes and the breezes pressed against him, fragrant, and articulate with the secrets of the great waste places.

He was home again! Home again, still contemptuous of Bozzam City, though susceptible to the lure of the beauty of the valley, and still the possessor of strange, violent passions and the fierce unrest that

after his father's death had made even the mighty valley seem like a prison.

Wild, untamed, intractable, he had been when five years ago he had stood on the platform at Bozzam City waiting for the train that was to bear him eastward; and the few citizens who had lingered to see him off had given him the tribute of their polite respect. Now, at twenty-seven, he was back again, after having submitted to five years of tortuous refining in the crucible of civilization.

He had not banished the violent impulses that had characterized him in the days before he left the valley; but he had learned to govern them; he had found the virtue of deliberation. And because he had fought to master himself, certain lines of his face had changed. His chin now had a bold thrust, advertising a tenacity that had come through five years of determination to achieve self-control; his eyes had become a deeper, softer blue, where before they had been pale and agate hard; his mouth had now an expression of cold whimsicality, where in other days it had betrayed wantonness.

He was twenty-seven and looked thirty. The clear, bronzed skin of his face was healthy and firm; his big shoulders were those of an athlete; and his step was light, as having finished his inspection of the valley, he picked up his bag and walked toward the door of the station, where he saw the agent leaning against one of the jambs, his head surrounded by a halo of tobacco smoke from a short-stemmed corn-cob pipe.

As he passed the west wall of the station he saw two men watching him intently, with frank curiosity. He knew both, but it was evident they did not recognize him. His Eastern clothes, his matured manner, together with the atmosphere of sophistication that lingered about him, made a disguise that the curiosity of the men could not penetrate.

One of the men was Lemuel Clearwater, who owned the Star ranch, some miles west of Bozzam City on the Elk River. He was big, smooth shaved, prosperous looking. The skin of his fat, round face was abloom with health, his eyes were clear and keen.

He was ponderous, but muscular, and his shoulders bulged the sleeves of the gray woolen shirt he wore. He stood with legs asprawl, his back against the wall of the station. A careless thumb was hooked in the cartridge belt that encircled his corpulent waist; a wide-brimmed sombrero sat well back on his head, disclosing the fact that he was bald and not ashamed of it.

The other man was Ed Bannack. He was dark, slender, and of medium height. He was younger than the big man, and his countenance was not so pleasant to look upon.—He had steady gray eyes, a long nose that seemed to twitch inquisitively, and his mouth seemed always ready to droop into a sneer. He was arrayed in a dark woolen shirt, sombrero, leather chaps, boots. A cartridge belt encircled his middle, and a six-shooter hung on his right hip.

Lannon's swift glance at the men provided him with these details of their appearance. He liked Clearwater; he had never been an admirer of Bannack.

As he passed them on his way to the door of the station he saw Bannack nudge Clearwater and chuckle sneeringly. Clearwater looked doubtful, as though not quite certain that the provocation to laugh was sufficient.

The agent was a stranger to Lannon, and while he waited for the man to reply to his query regarding the probable arrival of his trunks, Lannon meditated upon the ironic fugacity of fame. The former station agent had been proud to know him, and had shamelessly betrayed his pride on the station platform on the day Lannon had gone eastward; and at that time there had not been a man in the valley who would have confessed that he hadn't heard of Lannon. But the present station agent delayed a reply to his question the better to inspect him, while Clearwater and Bannack, thinking him a stranger, seemed to consider him deserving of their not too silent ridicule.

"Trunks—eh?" said the agent finally. "We'll, I dunno. It's likely they'll come in on number six. Mebbe not till tuh-morrow mornin'. You come in for the barbecue?"

A malicious mood was upon Lannon.

The look he gave the agent was so steadily truculent that the latter began to have doubts concerning the accuracy of his conclusions.

"Did I come in for the barbecue?" said Lannon. "I'll think it over. If I did I'll come back and tell you about it. If I didn't, I suppose I can stay here just the same?"

"I reckon," conceded the agent, his mouth popping open.

"All right. I didn't want you to worry about it."

Lannon turned, walked a little distance, and came to a halt in front of Clearwater and Bannack. He ignored Clearwater, but gazed with level eyes at Bannack.

"Bannack," he said, "it's unmannerly to sneer at a man when you think he isn't looking at you. If you do it again while I'm in town I'll sure make you hard to catch."

Bannack essayed a sneer. It was a dismal failure. He was held by Lannon's gaze as though by a magnet. He reddened, coughed, writhed; but words would not come. In the end he was forced to lower his gaze. He stood, staring blankly at his feet while Lannon turned and strode off without looking back.

It was not until Lannon had reached Bozzam City's street that Bannack or Clearwater moved or spoke.

"Sufferin' wildcats!" ejaculated Clearwater, then. And—"Gawd Almighty, them eyes! They near froze me!"

"Flash Lannon!" said Bannack, thickly. He was pale; his eyes bulged as he stared after the retreating figure of the man who had so unceremoniously humbled him.

"Hell!" exclaimed Clearwater. "I'll be damned if it wasn't him! Sufferin' cats! Now what do you think about that?"

CHAPTER II.

" GET OUT OF HYEH!"

LANNON made his way across an open space beside the shipping pens flanking a spur and gained a board walk that paralleled the fronts of Bozzam City's shanties on the south side of the street.

Several ewe-necked ponies stood at the various hitching rails he passed. All bore saddles with the familiar ox-bow stirrup, and all were dust-covered, drooping, drowsy. Farther down the street was a canvas-covered wagon. "The Cross-in-a-box is in for supplies," was Lannon's comment as his gaze went to the brand on the disreputable looking horses. "I wonder how old Grammus is making it."

At a little distance out on the plains east of town Lannon saw a rider. He was astride a black horse, gayly caparisoned. The rider looked like a Mexican vaquero, for he wore Mexican chaparejos of yellow leather, studded down the seams with lumps of turquoise stones set in silver; his boots were spurred with silver, and his bell-crowned sombrero was bespangled with the same metal. Other bits of attire, which seemed to betray the nationality of the rider were a short, close-fitting black velvet jacket with wide, bell-like cuffs, silver buttoned; a brown sash, glistening boots, their tops hidden under the wide chaps; a neckerchief of bright yellow and a long, lead-tipped quirt, dangling from the left wrist.

The rider was not far away; and Lannon distinctly heard his voice as he greeted a man who stood in a doorway at a little distance down the street:

"*Buenas días, señor!*"

"You're comin' in plenty of time!" shouted the man who was standing in the doorway.

"One must never be late for *la fiesta*," responded the rider, this time in English, with a mocking lilt in his voice.

He came on toward Lannon, who now observed that the Mexican costume was an affectation. For though the rider was dark of face, his features were unmistakably those of the white race. In addition the rider had yellow hair, blue eyes, and lashes that were faded to a light straw color.

"Campan!" yelled a voice far up the street, behind the rider. "Campan!" came the voice again. "You ol' son-of-a-gun, come back hyah!"

The rider did not answer; did not seem to hear. For at that moment he was abreast of Lannon, and he was devoting

his entire attention to the latter, his eyes glowing insolently, his lips parted in a smile of contempt.

Lannon had glanced briefly at the rider just before the latter came abreast, and he passed on in ignorance of the other's insulting scrutiny.

In front of the livery stable Lannon paused. He was on the point of hiring a horse to ride to the Bosque Grand, but the agent's word, "barbecue," appealed insidiously, flaunting its promise of diversion. He went on again and turned in upon a wide, paved gallery that extended across the front of a two-story log building with a big door in the center above which was a gilt sign in rambling letters:

BOZZAM CITY HOTEL

The structure had been Bozzam City's first building. In fact, it had been erected before the coming of the railroad, and its former owner, Lafe Hollowel, forced out by the encroachments of civilization, had sold the house and packed all his belongings clear out of the valley over the Capitan Divide, "whar no damned railroad can't never come!"

Lafe had not waited to watch the defamation of his erstwhile ranch-house, nor, in the memory of any of the people of Bozzam City, had he returned for a glance at the railroad he affected to despise.

To Lannon the old building was a familiar landmark. The Hollowels had been neighbors and had been very friendly toward the Lannons. Lannon paused at the big door and glanced back over the gallery he had crossed. Many times had he enjoyed its shade, its restful atmosphere. The presence of various chairs scattered here and there on the gallery gave to the historical spot a hint of the use to which it was being put, and he did not have to strain his imagination to visualize the boarders sitting in the chairs, filling the place with small talk.

And now as he stood in the doorway he was again impressed with the ugliness of the town; by the dilapidated appearance of the buildings; by the refuse and rubbish that lay everywhere, and by the at-

mosphere of foulness that seemed to hover over it all.

He found himself wondering why he had treasured a mental picture of the spot during the years of his absence. But when he looked beyond the gallery and the town at the mountains shining in the distance, and saw how the shimmering sunlight touched with glory the rugged crests of some remote buttes and spread a rose veil from horizon to horizon and from the slumberous earth to the farthest reaches of the vast arch of blue sky, he knew that the picture he had treasured had not been of Bozzam City but of the clean, pure land that surrounded it.

Strange emotions gripped him as he turned to enter the big doorway of the hotel. And then a voice, coming from the interior, smote his ears and brought him to a halt on the threshold.

The voice was a girl's. He was certain of that, for it had the unmellowed flavor of an adolescence not long achieved, a sharpness that somehow expressed the arrogance of youth, and a vitriolic quality that spoke eloquently of temper.

"Darn you, Dave Devake, you quit devilin' me an' get out of hyeh!"

CHAPTER III.

"I'M APOLOGIZING TO THE LADY."

LANNON stepped inside, to find himself in the well-remembered "big" room, which extended clear to the rear of the house, where another door, as large as the one through which he had entered, opened into a *patio*. A huge archway at his right disclosed another big room, in which in the old days there had been an enormous fireplace.

Lannon halted in the archway and glanced into the room. The big fireplace was still there. Above it, surmounting a rough plank mantel shelf, was the mammoth deerhead which old Hollowel had always proudly exhibited; in front of it was the crude, home-made horsehair lounge, upon which Lannon had sat many times. But the walls which had once been graced by personal treasures, intimate and valued

—by hanging powderhorn and rifle, and interestedly splotted by the skins of various animals, each having a history—were now desecrated by multicolored lithographs, calendars advertising a "new" soap, a pain killer, pills, a new brand of whisky, a corn cure.

At Lannon's right as he stood in the archway, and extending almost across the front of the room, was a counter with a wire wicket in its center. Behind the counter was a window which looked out upon Bozzam City's one street. Also behind the counter was a wall clock. Standing just beneath the clock was a girl, undoubtedly the girl of the voice.

Her eyes were ablaze with wrath. They did not seem to see Lannon, but they flashed dark lightnings at a tall, slender man who stood close to the counter, his back toward Lannon. Lannon could not see the man's face, but even if he hadn't heard the girl speak his name he would have known him as a gambler who had frequented Bozzam City's resorts in the old days. Devake was smooth, suave, cunning, bland, cruel.

The girl was not tall, for merely her head and shoulders showed above the top of the counter; though she seemed taller because of the imperious way she held her chin as she looked at Devake. A pugnacious self-reliance characterized her. She was not afraid of the man who faced her across the counter.

Her pallor, even if Lannon had not heard her voice, would have told him that her wrath was genuine. Her black hair was in bulging waves and coils. It curved glossily against her white forehead and drooped gracefully at her temples, framing the smooth oval of her face and accentuating the velvet texture of her skin.

She was startlingly beautiful, and Lannon had some difficulty in believing her to be the owner of the voice which had uttered the threat.

"Deviling you?" said the man banteringly. "I was just telling you the truth, Glory. You're the best looking girl in the valley."

"If I was I reckon I'd know it, Dave Devake!" declared the girl. "And if I

didn't know it I wouldn't want a chromo like you to tell me about it. I want you to get out of hyeh!"

Devake laughed.

"Plenty of time, Glory—plenty of time. I've been wanting to have a talk with you, and there ain't any one around now. You ain't fooling me any with your high and mighty airs. It's been hinted that more than one—"

Lannon's shoulder struck Devake, and knocked him off balance. Before he could recover and turn to confront the force that had driven into him, his arms were seized from behind; he was whirled by a power that seemed irresistible and his back jammed against the counter. Then he found himself staring into Lannon's face.

For an instant Devake stood motionless; then he straightened, got his feet squarely under him, and began to raise his right hand toward the gun in the holster at his right hip. His face was bloated with rage, his eyes glittered with malignance.

But his hand had moved only a little distance upward when it slowed, stopped, the fingers spread wide. The poisonous red went out of his face, leaving it pale. The malignance faded from his eyes, and his mouth began to open.

Experienced, wise, cunning, Devake had instantly noted that the newcomer was a "tenderfoot"—that he was apparently unarmed. And though Devake's hand was not more than a few inches from the butt of his own six-shooter, and though he knew many words that, spoken now, would have brought on the violence he craved, he did not utter one of them, nor did his hand move any farther toward his gun.

He stood rigid, motionless, his legs asprawl, staring into Lannon's eyes. What he saw there seemed to fascinate him. Swimming deep in Lannon's eyes was a whimsical wantonness, a sneering mockery, a cold contempt, and a chilling confidence—and an arrogance that must be founded upon a complete knowledge of the man's ability to take care of himself in any crisis. More; there was a lusting eagerness somewhere in Lannon's eyes, a passion that Devake had seen in the eyes of gunmen of his time—"killers" seeking provocation.

Strangely, Devake was seeing Lannon in a different garb—in the trappings of a cowboy. Lannon's Eastern clothing had vanished. Leather chaps seemed to adorn his legs; soft-topped boots with high heels had replaced the gleaming shoes; a brown flannel shirt enveloped Lannon's big shoulders; a blue neckerchief sagged at his throat; a wide-brimmed felt hat, pulled well down over the eyes, had been magically substituted for the black derby. Two guns, suspended from a cartridge belt that crossed his waist loosely, were sagging at his hips, the holster bottoms tied to the legs of the chaps with rawhide thongs.

The mental picture was real, vivid. Although Devake's memory did not serve him well, he was certain he had seen the stranger before; he was sure he was not really a stranger, but a familiar figure that elusive memory would not or could not identify.

Devake's vicious impulses had fled. He now wished nothing more than to go peaceably on his way. He felt cold, shaken; his muscles were numbed, his brain atrophied.

To his astonishment Devake discovered that his mouth was opening, and that words were issuing from it. A voice, which he did not recognize, said thickly: "I'm apologizing to the lady."

And then he felt himself walking across the room. He went through the archway, passed over the gallery and into the street, and made his way down the board walk, strangely thankful for the heat and the sunlight.

Lannon watched Devake cross the gallery. The girl still stood behind the counter. She said nothing, though Lannon saw that she watched him speculatively, as if she was as yet unable to comprehend what had happened.

Lannon did not offer any explanation, though he had readily accounted for Devake's strange actions. No miracle had been worked. He had known Devake in the old days. He was convinced that Devake had recognized him. That was all. Devake had merely decided not to force trouble.

Lannon crossed the room and seated

himself on the lounge. Leaning against the high back, he stared reflectively into the dead fireplace.

A bit of the old life had flashed out at him in the well remembered room. What had happened to the girl might have happened anywhere, even in the East. But it seemed to him that civilization's methods would have softened the process; that vice would have hidden its face.

He sat long, drawing his contrasts. A sound disturbed his reflections, and he looked up to see the girl standing at the end of the lounge at his left, silently watching him.

She had evidently been standing there for some time. Her eyes, while aggressive, held a certain wistfulness, and her flushed face told him very plainly that she was thinking of what Devake had said to her.

"You didn't believe him?"

There was a taint of bitterness in her voice, strangely mingled with a repressed fierceness. She had almost gulped the question at him.

"Devake? Certainly not! Why should I believe a man who insults women?"

"I was hoping you wouldn't. I'm square. Just because I'm running this hotel while dad's away ain't no sign that I'm what he almost said—what a lot of folks think."

"If you're square in your own mind you ought to be satisfied," said Lannon. "If you expect people to accept you at your own valuation you are going to be disappointed."

"Stranger, you've got sense," she said, her eyes kindling. They were brown eyes, deep, velvety, with shades of meditative thought swiftly moving in them. He looked away from them once, then back again quickly, probing them, fascinated by their eloquence.

"I've been thinking that myself. That's why I don't care a darn what they think!" There was fierce defiance in her voice.

Lannon felt his senses assailed by an intangible glamour, a strange sensation of pleasure which was like no other that he had ever experienced. He had found satisfaction in looking upon other women, but this was a feeling that went deeper, that

was more exhilarating, that stirred forces within him which seemed to have been dormant. He had felt it with his first glance at her, and the thing was growing upon him.

He was certain that her appeal to him came through her startling frankness, her genuineness, the honesty that shone in her eyes, her instinctive reaching out for the hand of fellowship and faith, like a child seeking sympathy.

She sank to the arm of the lounge, straightened her skirts and stared into the fireplace. When she again spoke it seemed she had conquered the emotion that had thus far oppressed her. She smiled faintly, without guile, when she discovered he was watching her.

"How did you do it?" she said.

"Do what?"

"Make Dave Devake crawl that way. Why, he just sneaked out as though he was scared you'd bite his haid off. And he had a gun! You didn't. You ain't got one anywhere on you, hev you? In your pocket or in a sling under your coat?"

"I have no gun."

"It beats me! Ain't you scared of Dave?"

"I don't seem to be."

"I reckon you don't. I expaict it ain't hard to explain though. You've got a sort of chilling eye, stranger; and mebbe Dave saw something in you that is a heap worse than a gun. Devake ain't nobody's fool. But Dave ain't the sort to forget. He'll come back hyeh and run you out of town."

There was pity in her glance, now. He had defended her, he had been gallant to her. But he was of that soft and not uncommon type of man contemptuously termed "tenderfoot" by the rough, seasoned men of the West, and it was inevitable that Devake would return to exact vengeance for the indignity offered him.

"I reckon you would hide, though. You could keep out of sight till number six comes in. And if I went to the station with you Devake wouldn't dare shoot you."

"Thank you. I'm staying in town to-night. Here, if you have room."

"There's plenty of room. But Dave'll kill you, stranger!"

"I think not. Anyway, I'm staying."

She sighed, but her eyes were bright as they searched his face.

"You've got grit," was her tribute. Then for a time she sat silent, idly swinging a dangling foot, turning it this way and that, inspecting it. Twice she glanced at Lannon's gleaming shoes, comparing them with her own.

Presently Lannon turned and caught her looking at him. She blushed, got up immediately and went behind the counter, where she stood with her elbows on its top, her chin in her hands watching his head, which was visible above the back of the lounge.

"Glory," Devake had called her, reflected Lannon. To his knowledge he had never heard of her. Obviously, therefore, she had come to Bozzam City after he had left to go East to school. He was curious.

As a type she was not new to him. Hollowel had had a girl like her, self-reliant, courageous, aggressive. Environment had shaped her character, of course. This was peculiarly a man's country, and any girl in a family where males predominated must of necessity be somewhat influenced by the masculine atmosphere of the home and must inevitably adopt masculine mannerisms. Lafe Hollowel's girl had been so much like her brothers that Lannon had often wondered if she were not a boy masquerading in female attire.

But whatever the masculine influence in Glory's life it had not robbed her of those graces which are so essentially feminine. Her language was strongly flavored with the tang and idioms of the southwest, Texas he supposed, but her personality would have been the same no matter what the imperfections of her language. There had been a suggestion of careless indifference to appearances in her action in unconcernedly draping herself on the arm of the lounge. But the thing had been done with a serene unconsciousness of sex, quite as though the thought of her doing anything unusual had not entered her mind.

He had seemed to ignore the movement that had taken her away from the lounge to her present position behind the counter; but he knew she was there and that she

was watching him, for her reflection was in a small mirror that hung on the wall almost in front of the lounge.

"Town is pretty quiet to-day?" he suggested.

"Always is. Except by spells. I reckon to-night will be a spell."

"Barbecue?"

"Yep. Who told you?"

"The station agent."

"Jim Johnson is a fool!"

"Agreed. Any other fools in town?"

"Plenty. I reckon I'm one for staying hyeh."

"Not much business, I presume?"

"Oh, it ain't that—so much. There's a living hyeh for me and dad. We couldn't expaict much more than that, anyway. It's the darned men. I reckon Bozzam City's got the meanest men in the country!" She paused and then went on bitterly. "They think all women are alike."

"Women aren't. You don't mean to tell me that all the men of Bozzam City are like Devake?"

"Mostly. Them that ain't like him are worse."

"Bad men, eh?"

"Yep. And more drift in. On spees. Mostly they hang around the saloons. When a bunch comes in and starts to raising the devil I shut up the house and keep them out."

Watching her face in the mirror Lannon saw that her lips were twitching, that she had caught the lower one between her teeth and was biting it nervously as though in an effort to keep back words that were trying to surge through. Her eyes were gleaming mistily.

She was fighting a mental battle. Something she wanted to tell him was being held back because she felt she had no right to confide in him, a stranger. But he saw her resolution weaken; saw determination stiffen her lips and glow in her eyes.

"Stranger," she said steadily, "you're from the East and you must know a lot of girls. How do Eastern men treat their women?"

"As ladies, I hope."

"You speak as though you ain't sure. Ain't you ever kept company with a girl?"

"To be sure. I've known quite a few girls."

"Well; how did you treat them?"

"As ladies, of course."

"And were *all* of them ladies?"

"I hope so. I shouldn't want to think otherwise."

"You wouldn't, of course. I reckon it's a mighty hard thing to get at. I expaict I'll hev to speak right out. I'm asking you straight if there's anything about me that would make a man think I ain't a lady?"

Lannon turned and looked at her. "What makes you say that?" he asked. "There is no question about your being a lady."

She blushed, but her eyes were steady and probing, searching his for signs of insincerity.

"I ain't much on grammar, stranger."

"That has nothing to do with the question."

"I don't wear clothes like a lady wears." She made a gesture which seemed to invite him to remember the coarseness of her attire, which consisted of a brown woolen blouse with a low, turn-down collar caught together with a flowing, blue silk tie; a skirt which fell just below her knees which had impressed him as a strictly utilitarian garment of uncertain material; woolen stockings which had been darned in many places, and shoes which he had observed were small and well shaped.

"I believe the quality of clothing one wears does not enter into the question at all," declared Lannon.

"And I'm living hyeh, among a lot of men, running this hotel while dad's away."

"Which does you credit?"

"And in spite of all that you still think I'm a lady?"

"I haven't doubted it for an instant."

"Then, stranger," she concluded, her eyes unwavering; "why do men—like Dave Devake and a good many others—come in hyeh and act toward me as Devake acted a little while ago? Is there anything about me that makes them feel that they've got a right to act like that toward me?"

"There are men like Devake everywhere," said Lannon.

"They ought to be killed, darn them!"

Little spots of brown and fire gathered and glowed in her eyes. "I wish dad would sell out and get out of hyeh. I'm getting mighty sick of looking at the chromos that drift in hyeh. According to report there ain't been a regular, honest-to-goodness man in this section of the country since Flash Lannon pulled up his stakes and went East. I've heard so much about Flash Lannon that I'd give a heap to see him. Folks hev talked about him so much that I'm half in love with him."

Lannon turned and gazed into the fireless grate.

"I've heard of such things," he said.

"Heard of what things?"

"Of women falling in love with men they have never seen. But I suppose that sort of love doesn't take."

"Why not?" she challenged. "Why shouldn't it take? If the man that a girl loves without seeing him comes pretty near being what she's made of him I don't see why she couldn't keep right on loving him."

"That's just the point. When you see this man Lannon you might be disappointed in him."

"I reckon that might happen, but I don't think it will. Folks hev told me what he looks like. They say he's handsome. That wouldn't be anything in his favor if there was nothing to go with his looks. But according to what folks say about him there's a heap more to him than looks. You can most always tell what sort a man is by thinking a little about the folks who talk about him. If a man is pretty generally run down by men that don't amount to much themselves; and praised by men who do amount to something, you can come pretty near to figuring your man has got something about him that makes him pretty decent."

"I take it that Lannon has enemies as well as friends?"

"Plenty of both. Men like Devake and Bannack and some others hev done a lot of talking about Lannon. Now and then I've heard them. Seems like Lannon had done some mighty plain talking to those men. I've heard them tell what they'd do to Lannon if he ever comes back to the valley."

"What have Lannon's friends said to that sort of talk?"

"Just laughed—sort of sticking their tongues in their cheeks."

"Well," said Lannon, meditatively gazing into the fireplace, "if I were you I wouldn't let the things people say about Lannon influence me too much. During a man's absence his friends are likely to give him extravagant praise, while his enemies are apt to tell the truth about him."

She gave him a defiant glance, which he caught in the little mirror.

"According to that, Lannon's friends must have been a pretty poor sort, for they didn't praise him any. I told you they'd laugh and stick their tongues in their cheeks when some one talked about Lannon. But why didn't Lannon's enemies get even with him while he was hyeh?"

"Just plain scared, I reckon. They'd talk big when Lannon wasn't around, but let him come within a dozen miles of them and they'd have business somewhere else!"

"Lannon was a terrible fighter, stranger. My dad, who used to come over hyeh from Lazette, saw him more than once. That was more than five years ago. Lannon wasn't more than twenty-two or three years old then, but dad said his age wasn't a heap visible when he was looking at a man who'd done him a wrong."

"So you've been here five years?" said Lannon.

"A little more than two years. Lannon was about six feet tall, according to dad. He was built in proportion. Dad said he never saw a finer looking man. He used to ride a big, silver horse he called Polstar. And dad says that when he was on that horse there wasn't a handsomer man—"

"You lived in Lazette?" questioned Lannon, quickly.

"About thirty miles south of Lazette," answered Glory. "Lannon's folks lived at the Bosque Grand, about thirty miles south of hyeh on Bear River. But Lannon's dad was the first cattleman in this valley, and he mighty near owned it. It was named after him. According to what I've heard, Flash Lannon grew up sort of wild. Not vicious, you understand, but just full of the devil. I've heard folks say that when

he was eighteen there wasn't a man living within a hundred miles of the valley that would face him when he was stirred to anger. When Flash was twenty a man he'd bested in a gun fight sent a Texas gunfighter into the valley to kill him. Flash heard the gunfighter was looking for him, and he rode into town hyeh—which wasn't as big as it is now—after sending word to the gunfighter that he was coming.

"A number of men saw the meeting, and they'll tell you to this day that they never saw any gunplay like it before or since. That gunfighter never went back to Texas. Flash shot him three times while he was getting his gun out, after giving him his chance."

"When do you expect your father to return?" questioned Lannon. He was hugely embarrassed by the girl's talk about himself, was hoping he might divert her thoughts, and was aware that he could not now reveal his identity to her. She had said too much. Later, after the edge had worn off her embarrassment over the discovery that she had praised him while under the impression that she had been talking to another, he would tell her and apologize for not revealing himself. He had let her go until now, because never in his life had praise sounded so sweet to him.

"Dad won't be home for another week," she said, answering him. "Stranger," she added, her eyes shining, her color high; "don't it stir you to hear about Flash Lannon? If he was hyeh in this room I reckon I'd sure kiss him for the enjoyment I've got out of listening to folks talk about him. Folks say there never was a man like Flash Lannon!"

"Perhaps you are estimating him too highly, Miss—" He paused.

"Stowe," she supplied.

"I should say there must be something of the demon in a man who goes about shooting other men offhandedly," he said, not looking at the girl.

"That's the Eastern viewpoint, of course," she replied quickly. "Back East there's laws for everything. Out hyeh we've got to depend on custom because there ain't nothing better. And it's the custom out hyeh that when one man tells

another he's coming to shoot him at a certain time, he's got a right to do it if the other man don't keep out of his way. And if a man hears that another man has threatened to shoot him, he's got a right to shoot the other man on sight. You see, it's as fair for one as for the other, and justice has no right to complain. But justice complains if after telling another man to leave town the man follows the other man out of town and kills him. That's murder.

"Flash Lannon has never violated our code out hyeh. He's always obeyed the sort of law we hev. Nobody ever accused him of taking an unfair advantage."

"Well," laughed Lannon, "I surrender. I wonder if you would mind telling me which room I'm to have? I'd like to wash up and have a look at the town."

"Sure," she said, quickly; "I'm a box-haid for keeping you sitting there listening to my raving about Flash Lannon. I reckon you can hev the room right over the big room. It's the best we've got. You want to register right now?"

"When I come down, if it's just the same to you," he said. He was already on his way toward the long hall, his traveling bag in hand.

"You'll find the stairs at the rear of the big room," she called to him. He turned to thank her, and saw her leaning on the counter, her elbows on its top, her chin resting in her cupped hands. She was watching him speculatively, the shadow of an admiring smile on her lips.

"Thank you," he said.

"You're entirely welcome," she returned gently.

CHAPTER IV.

GLORIA'S SCORN.

WHAT meant the faint but growing thrill that possessed Gloria Stowe as she listened to the sounds of the stranger's retreating footsteps? How could she account for the strange tumult that was going on in her bosom? It was something like a sensation she had experienced when one morning in her early youth she had awakened to find a long-wished-for ruby

ring on her finger, a present from her dad. The feeling was the same, except that it was now more intense, even if more elusive. For it assailed her, and she could not define it; it was intangible, as enchanting as a forbidden dream.

After a time she walked to the mirror on the wall near the lounge. By standing on the tips of her toes she was able to gaze into the glass at her reflection. She saw her scarlet cheeks, eyes that had a shamed, velvety look.

"Shucks," she whispered. "Why, he didn't say more than half a dozen words to me. Just treated me like—like a lady. And hyeh I'm trying to fall in love with him!"

Did real ladies permit themselves to think the thoughts she was thinking at this minute? She doubted, and a grave thought assailed her. If she permitted the stranger to see that she liked him when she had known him not more than an hour, would there not be some justification for Devake's attitude toward her? Was there really something about her that made men think their advances would be encouraged?

Fiercely, her face paling, she fought the thought, blaming her ignorance for her inability to discover just how she should act toward men in order to convince them of her right to be treated as a lady. Some consolation she found in the stranger's words: "If you're square in your own mind you ought to be satisfied."

But that consolation was not complete enough. What satisfaction was there in being a lady if men would persist in thinking her otherwise? She wanted the respect that she knew was due her.

"And I'll hev it, darn them!" she declared. "If a stranger can treat me like a lady the rest of them hev got to!"

And then she went again behind the counter, where she stood, listening to the stranger moving about upstairs.

So absorbed was she in her thoughts that she forgot to think of time until the savory odor of cooking was swept to her on a slight breeze that came through the long hall. Then she ran out into the kitchen to where the Chinese cook was stoically working in the heat from a red hot stove.

"Do your best to-day, Ching Loo," she said earnestly; "we've got an Eastern guest."

"Alle right," grinned Ching Loo. "We got plenty heap for one tenderfoot."

Walking back through the big hall toward the office, Gloria paused for an instant, her face flushing. Dismounting from a big gray horse in front of the hotel was a tall, handsome girl of about twenty. The girl wore a brown riding suit which fitted her snugly, and which betrayed a graceful, slender figure; high, soft riding boots encased her legs; a wide brimmed beaver hat sat jauntily on her head; a brown blouse of rich material showed between the lapels of her riding jacket. Dark tan gauntlets covered her hands, and as Gloria watched her she dismounted, hitched the horse to the rail, and removing the gloves, flicked some dust from the bottom of her skirt with the fingers.

The girl was Ellen Bosworth, daughter of James K. Bosworth, who owned the biggest ranch in the valley, not even excepting the Bosque Grand.

Gloria had seen Ellen Bosworth many times, but always from a distance. And word of Bosworth's enormous wealth and power had reached Gloria's ears through the medium of rumor's countless tongues. Even discounting by half the stories of Bosworth's wealth and power, he still must be a rich and influential man, in the East.

And Bosworth spent most of his time East, visiting his ranch perhaps once or twice a year, when Bozzam City would gape in astonishment at the vast number of trunks and boxes belonging to him, which would be pyramided on the station platform until hauled westward to his ranch, to return to the station platform some weeks later.

Gloria's interest had never been centered upon Bosworth. His wealth and power did not interest her. She never neglected to watch Ellen. For Ellen, despite a certain fastidiousness, was Gloria herself—should the magic of time and wealth ever provide her with the opportunity.

She thought, when visualizing herself in Ellen's station, that perhaps she would not be quite so stiff and proud as the other, and

she might smile more and not seem so unconscious of the admiring stares of strangers; nor would she be quite as aloof and haughty. Ellen was just a trifle too arrogant, even for a lady. And there was no doubt of her being a lady!

Gloria was behind the counter when Ellen Bosworth entered the big front door. Gloria had watched her from the front window, behind the desk; and though Gloria fought hard to repress the excitement that had seized her, she was breathing rapidly when Ellen appeared in the archway between the office and the big hall.

Ellen's gaze about the office was slow and intent, as though she were searching for something that would dissuade her from staying longer. But to Gloria's astonishment, Ellen smiled engagingly when she spoke.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "You are Gloria Stowe, are you not? I've heard of you. I've come in to attend the festivities at Benson's, to-night—the barbecue, you know; and I've been wondering if you could give me a room to-night and furnish me with lunch and dinner to-day, and breakfast to-morrow. I don't come to town alone very often as a rule, but father was so very busy that he simply wouldn't come with me. I promise that I won't make the slightest bit of trouble."

"I reckon we can accommodate you, ma'am; the house is nearly empty. There's only one guest hyeh at present." Gloria smiled at the girl she had thought arrogant, and who wasn't arrogant at all!

"It's mighty near noon, Miss Bosworth," she added. "I'll tell Ching Loo you are hyeh."

"Thank you."

Miss Bosworth looked at the lounge. She was standing near it, gazing into the fireplace when Gloria reappeared; and she followed Gloria upstairs and into a surprisingly well furnished room.

Ellen Bosworth moved about the room as though she was quite accustomed to staying at hotels; and to Gloria's amazement she acted much as Gloria felt she herself would act if she were preparing to occupy a strange room. She glanced with interest at the bed, which was neat and clean

and billowy, with a spotless white counterpane; her gaze roved from the lace curtains of the windows to the old-fashioned but shining dresser that stood between them. She inspected the carpet, the chairs, and then looked out of the window into the street.

Then she took off her hat, laid it on the bed, and walked to the dresser, where she gazed critically at herself in the mirror.

"It's a very nice room, Miss Stowe," she said. "I consider myself very fortunate in getting it. Father said the Bensons wished me to stay there for the night. But I have attended barbecues before, and I know what a racket they make at them—sometimes all night. And I shan't stay all night, you know."

At a stroke Ellen Bosworth had granted Gloria equality. There was no taint of patronage in her manner, no suspicion of haughtiness; and Gloria went downstairs a few minutes later with an entirely new conception of her guest's character. Silently Gloria entered the office. Then she walked to the front door and back to the archway again, where she paused and moved her lips wordlessly, mentally repeating Ellen Bosworth's speech and endeavoring to emulate her manner.

She moved to the lounge as Ellen had done, and stood for an instant gazing into the fireplace. Then she went to the little mirror on the wall and removed an imaginary hat and coat, striving to imitate Ellen's movements as she had stood before the glass in the room upstairs.

There had been an ease and grace in Ellen Bosworth's movements that Gloria could not duplicate, though she removed the imaginary hat and coat several times in the attempt. As she frowned into the glass in a vain endeavor to define exactly the word that would best express the indefinable and intangible something that had made Ellen's ordinary action so nearly regal, she became aware that the stranger stood in the archway looking at her. Lannon's face was entirely expressionless at the moment, but Gloria saw the amusement swimming deep in his eyes, and she knew he had witnessed at least part of her pantomimic performance.

She faced him courageously, though her cheeks were flaming.

"You saw me?"

"I couldn't help it. You see—"

"I'm not blaming you, stranger. You must hev thought I was loco. But I ain't. I was practicing being a lady."

"You have only to act naturally to be that, Miss Stowe."

"Shucks, stranger; there's other things. I can't describe them. Like putting on a hat, for instance—or taking one off. Or in standing a certain way when you talk to anybody. When I do it, it don't seem the same as when—as when other girls do it."

"It's merely a matter of training, I think."

"Mebbe. But there's something else, too. I think it's in the way a girl feels. If she's been treated like a lady I expaict she'll try to live up to the way she's been treated. Seems to me—"

She paused and held a warning finger to her lips.

"Sh-h!" she said. "She's coming!"

Lannon heard a step on the stairs, then in the big room opposite; and Ellen Bosworth was standing in the hall, looking at them.

For an instant the silence that had preceded Ellen's appearance continued. Lannon had bowed to her, and had turned again to Gloria with the intention of continuing their conversation. But the girl, wrongly construing his look as a mute suggestion for an introduction to Ellen, flushed and spoke haltingly.

"Stranger," she said, "this is Ellen Bosworth, of the Lazy J. Her dad is James K. Bosworth, of New York. I don't know what your name is, stranger, so you'll hev to introduce yourself."

"I am delighted to know you, Miss Bosworth," said Lannon. "I have heard a great deal about your father. He is a wonderful man, and I never thought the time would come when I should have him for a neighbor. I am Stephen Lannon, of the Bosque Grand ranch, about thirty miles south of here on Bear River."

Ellen Bosworth's eyes brightened with interest.

"Why, how remarkable!" she exclaimed.

"We've all heard of you, out here; have talked of your deeds to others. We've felt quite proud of you, while perhaps fearing you just a little. And to meet you in this manner! It is really astonishing."

She noted the steadiness of his eyes, the firmness of his chin, his big shoulders, the correctness of his clothing, the easy grace of his movements. There was approval in her glance.

Perhaps she detected the glint of cynicism in his eyes, aroused through his dislike of effusiveness; and, perhaps to punish him, she went on, her voice flavored with slight mockery:

"So you are the terrible 'Flash' Lannon—the man who once held this wild country in the hollow of his hand? I can hardly believe it!"

Lannon looked into Gloria's eyes. Deep in them swam reproach and shame. They were strangely dotted with little flecks of contempt and scorn.

She met his look steadily, though her face was flaming; and he knew she would never forgive him for the thing he had done.

He spoke to Ellen Bosworth, but he still held Gloria's gaze when he said: "I was once a fool, Miss Bosworth, and I suppose I've never got over it."

"What a startling admission!" laughed the girl. She stepped aside, exhibiting a polite indifference to the little drama that was being enacted before her, though keeping a mental picture of the faces of the two characters for future analysis, especially noting the tragic expression in Gloria's eyes. Lannon, big, magnetic, handsome, had been making a conquest of the girl, she supposed.

There came a musical clinking of spurs. Campan—he of the tight-fitting velvet jacket, the Mexican chaps, turquoise studded and silver spangled—strode in through the big front door and came toward Ellen. He made a sweeping bow as he saw her, and the bell-crowned sombrero touched the floor.

Campan had evidently been giving some attention to his person since he had passed Lannon in the street some time before. His velvet jacket was spotless; boots, chaps,

cartridge belt and leather holster were shining; his face, bronzed and bold, was abloom with health disclosed by the art of a barber; his tawny hair was smoothly parted; his light blue eyes were bright, hawklike, with a gleam of cool assurance.

"Miss Bosworth!" he said. "*No esperaba yo encontrarle a Vd. aquí!*"

"Don't lie, Campan," replied Ellen. "You certainly must have seen Silver standing in front of the hotel."

She extended a hand and with a contemptuous smile watched Campan kiss it. Then she drew it away and held it behind her. "I like you better when you are natural, Campan," she said. "The Mexican manner doesn't become you."

"*Gracias, señorita,*" returned Campan, mockingly. "It pleases you to be cold toward me. It was not always so when I was foreman for Señor Bosworth."

Though Campan's voice was low, so that Lannon and Gloria, standing at a little distance, could not hear, Ellen reddened and glanced swiftly toward the others. Then she looked back at Campan, her eyes flashing with rage.

"Campan," she said in a low voice, "if you ever speak to me in that manner again I'll have father run you out of the country, as he ran you away from the Lazy J."

Campan laughed smooth and easy. His faded blue eyes were agleam with insolence. He seemed unaffected by the cold fury in the girl's voice.

"Señor Bosworth is well, then?" he asked. For an instant as he peered into Ellen's eyes his own glowed with passion. "Señor Bosworth would have to be pretty powerful to run me out of the country now, my dear Ellen," he whispered, his voice now unflavored by the rounded labials of the language he had been affecting. "One day he will regret having sent me away."

Miss Bosworth did not answer. She deliberately turned her back to Campan and walked toward a table in the rear of the dining room around which the Chinese cook was hovering.

Lannon, too, was walking toward the table. He was a little distance ahead of Miss Bosworth, for when Gloria, after staring straight into his eyes with steady hostility

for several seconds, had contemptuously turned her back on him and walked behind the counter, he had decided that his offense was unforgivable. And he had started for the table an instant before Ellen turned away from Campan.

He faced Ellen across the table, and he carried on a desultory conversation with her. He was barely conscious of what he was saying to her, or of what she was saying in reply; for he was watching Gloria and Campan.

Campan was standing at the counter—leaning familiarly on it, talking to Gloria. Lannon could hear both voices plainly. Campan's loud salutation, "Hello, kid!" had contained a disgusting hint of proprietorship. And Gloria's, "I'm sure glad to see you!" while somehow odd and strained, seemed to suggest a free fellowship based upon a secret intimacy.

Lannon watched Gloria's face. It was still aflame. Her eyes were very bright and held a reckless gleam. Lannon felt that if Gloria still wished to know why men she met refused to grant her the respect and deference due the good and pure of her sex, she had only to glance at herself in the mirror on the wall near the lounge. But perhaps she saw her reflection in Campan's eyes, for she suddenly made a frightful face at him and slapped his cheek resoundingly.

"There, darn you!" she hissed. "Don't get so fresh!"

Campan laughed lowly.

"Don't sling your eyes on me like that if you don't want me to get fresh," he said. "But I wasn't meaning anything special, Glory," he went on placatingly. "Good Lord, if a man can't take a shine to a girl without her thinking he's getting fresh! Why, shucks, you're a lady, kid, and I'm telling it right out in meeting!"

"Campan, you're a liar!"

"I ain't!"

"You sure are. It ain't been more than two hours ago that a man was in hyeh, showin' me that he thought I wasn't a lady."

She glanced furtively at Lannon, whose face had turned red.

"You're telling me who this man is,

Glory. I'll sure bust his head a few!" threatened Campan.

"You won't bust anybody's haid for *me*, Campan. I'm able to take care of myself, and don't you forget it!"

For an instant her eyes darkened and held a fierce gleam, then she laughed harshly, recklessly.

"Campan," she said, "I reckon I know what you came in hyeh for!"

"Shucks—of course you do. I came in here to see you."

"Campan, you're fibbing." She deliberately winked at him. "I'm betting you came in hyeh to ask me to go to the barbecue with you."

"You've hit it," declared Campan.

His voice was vibrant with a queer note of triumph. He felt Gloria was striking at Ellen Bosworth; he imagined that the latter had in some way incurred Gloria's wrath, and that he was being used as a weapon. But he was not looking for mysteries; he had no interest in Gloria's differences with Ellen Bosworth; he was satisfied to take Gloria on any terms.

"That's settled," said Gloria. "I'll be ready about dusk. Now get out of hyeh!"

Campan laughed and strode out, bowing with extravagant politeness to Ellen Bosworth as he passed through the big hall, and grinning with curling lips at Lannon, who did not look at him.

CHAPTER V.

"GET RID OF LANNON RIGHT NOW!"

CANDLES, wax tapers and kerosene lamps illuminated the Benson ranch-house. For a space of perhaps fifty feet the ground in the vicinity of the ranch-house was bathed in the effulgent glow of light that issued from many windows. Beyond that was the dead, flat darkness of the desert night.

Strains of music from a fiddle floated out of the Benson windows; a piano was being thumped; voices mingled, masculine and feminine, gayly hilarious; feet were scraping on the floor of the big room, from which Benson had removed the carpet and all of the furniture.

Figures draped in white flitted past the open windows—women arrayed in finery treasured for just such occasions as this; men who felt more comfortable when arrayed in flannel shirt and overalls, spurred boots, and neckerchief were resplendent in holiday attire, and enjoying themselves, even though they felt awkward and were painfully conscious of their starched collars.

As for that, some starched collars were already being surreptitiously removed; for the edge of formality was beginning to wilt in the heat, and the whisky barrel in the bunk-house had gurgled often.

The Benson kitchen yielded the flavors of many delicacies. Outside a steer was roasting—whole—surrounded by many of Benson's guests and an important-looking gentleman in a white apron. The glowing fire illuminated many expectant faces. In the horse corral were ponies that had traveled steadily for two days to reach this spot in time; there were others that had come from distances nearly as great, and many that had started only that morning. Still others were from the ranches that lay within a radius of fifty or sixty miles; and some were from Bozzam City, whose lights were visible about two miles to the northeast.

Buckboards, spring wagons and buggies were scattered over the level around the stable and the corral fence, where their owners had left them after having brought their women and children.

"My turn next year," said a grizzled man who stood at the fire watching the roasting steer. "You'll hev to start the day before to git thar in time to do any feedin'."

"Feedin' ain't as important as drinkin', Colson," chuckled the man who stood beside him on the left. "If yore brand is popular all the trails to yore place will be a heap cluttered before you c'n kill yore steer."

"I reckon Benson's brand will do," said Colson. "The boys is hangin' around thet barrel like a swarm of flies."

"I'm seein' mostly the same mugs starin' into the cups," said another man. "Bozzam City fellers, most likely."

From where the steer was roasting the bunk-house was visible. Through its open door the brightly illuminated interior could be seen, together with those inside.

"Lem Clearwater, Ed Bannack, Dave Devake, Dakota, Slim Lally, Tulerosa, an' Campan," said a tall man as he scanned the faces in the group. "They're sure pourin' it in."

"So thet's Campan," said Colson. "I was thinkin' it was him, but I wasn't sure. Feller with the yaller pants with the jew'lry on 'em?"

"Yep."

"What's he allowin' to be doin' these days?"

Nobody answered Colson. Instead, level glances were directed at him, for perhaps there were friends of Campan at the fire.

Colson flushed. "I reckon I've strayed off my range," he said lamely.

There was a silence, during which the men around the fire watched the man with the white apron as he prodded the roasting steer with a huge fork.

"Well, I reckon we c'n lick'er up a little, boys," he suggested; "them other fellers has gone."

Ed Bannack, Dave Devake, Campan, and a tall, slim puncher with a hook nose, high cheek bones and truculent, squinting eyes, were moving toward the ranch-house in the darkness. The men who had been with them in the bunk-house had left them and were walking toward the fire where the steer was roasting.

"It's hot in there," said Bannack, indicating the house, as they approached. "I'm hangin' around here for a while."

"Too damned many kids," sneered Devake. "Why in hell can't folks leave their damned brats to home?"

Back a little distance from the house, where the glimmering light from within would not shine in their faces, the four men halted. They could see the dancers in the big room, and also a group of men and women standing in a doorway, looking on and awaiting their turn.

The men outside saw Gloria Stowe dancing with Benson. The girl did not seem to be enjoying herself, for she moved mechanically and her face was set and white.

"Looks as though she's sorry she come," said the slim puncher with the high cheek bones and the truculent eyes.

"She come for spite, I reckon, Tulerosa," said Campan. "Curious about her. She would never have anything to do with me—wouldn't let me come near her. To-day was different. I blowed in the hotel about noon, thinking to devil her. But mostly I reckon I wanted to get a look at a tenderfoot I seen going in there when I struck town.

"Going in, I bumped into Ellen Bosworth. She's as stuck up as ever. Pulled that high and mighty stuff on me. Well—that ain't the point. I'll 'tend to her one of these days—and old Bosworth, too.

"The tenderfoot was there. Strapping-looking yap with a cold eye. I reckon he's somebody where he come from. Him and Ellen Bosworth grubbed together while me and Glory was talking. Glory was fussed up, venomous as a scorpion, though she didn't want me to know it. Spoke of a guy that insulted her; asked me to bring her here. Something's gone wrong."

"I reckon I'm the one she meant insulted her, Campan." This was Devake. He met Campan's swift glance steadily and went on: "I was in there telling her I'd taken a shine to her. I didn't know you was interested."

"Devake, I reckon you wasn't spoiling nothing for me. Glory Stowe is for the man who gets her—and she's worth any man's time."

"It was the tenderfoot who spoiled things for me," said Devake. "Bumped ag'in' me, knocked me off balance, and jammed me ag'in' the counter."

Campan laughed harshly, incredulously. "That ain't supposed to be safe, is it, Devake?" he said, peering intently at the other. "Why didn't you sling your gun on him?"

Devake shook his head. "I don't seem to know. I wanted to go for my gun, but something appeared to hold me back. I ended out in the street, wondering how I'd got there and feeling sore of clammy, as though I'd just climbed out of an ice box."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Campan derisively. "Devake, I reckon you're needing

a doctor. You'd better go back to the barrel!"

The gambler scowled and shook his head uncertainly.

"It never happened before," he said. "Seems I've seen that tenderfoot before, but I can't place him. Sure as hell I've seen them damned eyes of his before!"

"Tenderfoot!" ejaculated Bannack uproariously. "Haw, haw, haw! That's too damned good to keep! Tenderfoot! I been listenin' to you damned fools shoot off your gab, waitin' an' thinkin' thet mebbe you'd wake up. You, Devake! You ought to know thet tenderfoot!"

Bannack came closer; he stuck his face close to Campan. His eyes were wild and fierce with suppressed excitement.

"Git your thinkin' caps on, you guys!" He grinned derisively into their faces. He expanded with importance.

"Talk, you damned fool!" commanded Campan sourly. "You're ready to bust."

"I'm talkin' fast enough!" declared Bannack. "Whar's your brains, anyhow? I'll name him. Thet tenderfoot is *Flash Lannon*! Does thet name mean anything to you?"

Campan whitened, stiffened. He stepped back a little, crouched, and stared at Bannack. Yellow pin points of flame danced in his eyes.

Devake cursed incoherently. His eyes were staring, his face was ghastly. Campan moved closer to the house. He peered into the big room and watched the dancers. When Lannon and Ellen Bosworth passed the window Campan started so violently that his whole body seemed to tense. An instant later he rejoined the others.

"It's him, right enough!" he said hoarsely. "He's older and bigger and he's got them damned dude clothes on—but it's him!" He wheeled on Bannack. "How long have you knowed it was him?" he demanded fiercely.

"Since he got off the train this mornin'," replied Bannack. "I was with Lem Clearwater on the station platform. I did not know then thet he was Flash, an' I was tellin' Lem thet before night I'd run momma's boy out of town. Them's the words I used—momma's boy!

"I reckon he must hev seen I was talkin' about him, for after he'd gassed with Jim Johnson he come back an' stuck his face into mine.

"Thet ain't no way to sneer at strangers, Bannack," he said, usin' my name free as you please. "If I see you doin' it agin I'll sure make you hard to ketch!" Them was his words."

"Why didn't you throw your gun on him?" muttered Campan.

"Why didn't Devake throw his'n on him?" queried Bannack. "I reckon for the same reason thet I didn't throw mine—it didn't seem to be the sensible thing to do!"

"He wasn't packing a gun," said Campan.

"He wasn't packin' none when Devake run into him in the hotel," pointed out Bannack. "Nor he ain't packin' none now. An' I reckon he looks just as soft an' easy as he looked this mornin', when I thought he was momma's boy just broke loose from her apron strings."

"You reckon he's figurin' to stay here?" said Campan, after a silence.

"Looks to me like school's over," replied Bannack. "Jim Johnson was tellin' me that about a week ago he sent a telegram to Lannon from Tom Yates, tellin' Lannon to come home right away. I knowed we'd run into hell soon as we started monkeyin' with the Bosque Grand stock. You guys wouldn't let well enough alone. When Tom Yates tells Flash Lannon what's been happenin' durin' the last few months there's goin' to be hell to pay!"

"Quit your damned croaking!" warned Campan. "I reckon the time to get rid of Lannon is right now!" he said. "You guys keep close and back my game."

He strode toward the ranch-house, the others at his heels.

CHAPTER VI.

"THE THIRD TIME I'LL KILL YOU!"

GLORIA STOWE was dancing with Campan. Campan was a graceful dancer, as light on his feet as a feather; so strong that he whirled her from

the floor without effort in the swings of the quadrille. Gloria went mechanically through the steps of the dance as she had gone through several others, and none could criticize her for not seeming to enter into the spirit of the evening, though her thoughts were not of the dancing or of Campan. It seemed her body was in the Benson ranch-house while her mind was still in the hotel office.

How readily Lannon had revealed his identity to Ellen Bosworth? No hesitation, no evasion. It seemed he had instantly recognized Ellen's right to know him.

Why hadn't he treated *her* that way? Why had he kept silent while she had related to him stories of his own greatness; while she had confessed that she had half fallen in love with him without having seen him?

She didn't love him at this minute. He was nothing like the ideal she had created, which her imagination had shaped and molded—the romantic figure of her dreams, invested with fire and life drawn from her own heart. The Lannon she had pictured was a reckless-eyed young man, bold, ardent, vibrant with passion, though gentle to women and straightforward and honorable. That was the Western Lannon.

The Eastern Lannon was nothing like that. He certainly was not reckless. Instead, his eyes seemed to express a serene and somewhat cynical deliberation, as though their owner was in the habit of considering all things trivial until demonstrated otherwise. He was cold, alert, quiet, imperturbable. Of course under the quietness could be felt the edge of an iron-like self-control, which had been revealed to her when he had been facing Devake in the hotel office; and there was a consciousness of power in his manner, a latent, ruthless force. But even though he was different to the man of her dreams she had felt the magnetism of him, a subtle force that had drawn her. But he had fooled her, had led her on, had amused himself with her; had considered her so negligible that he had not even bothered to reveal his identity to her even after she had declared her love for the Lannon of her dreams!

She hated him, now, even though she

was aware that he was not entirely to blame. He had had no right to amuse himself by encouraging her to talk about himself, but she had no doubt that her own unconventional impulses, which had led her to confide in a stranger, had given him a wrong impression.

Once as Campan released her hand and passed her to the next male dancer, to the command of the fiddler's "*Alemanade, left!*" she became aware that Lannon's hand was reaching for hers. She refused the grasp and flashed him a glance of hate as he passed, even though as her gaze met his she saw his eyes glow with regret.

"Hypocrite!" she breathed, almost into the ear of the next male dancer, who, obedient to the voice of the fiddler, had grabbed her around the waist and was whirling her in a dizzy circle, as other men were whirling other women.

"What you sayin'?" demanded her erstwhile partner.

She didn't even look at the man; she was watching Ellen Bosworth, who was gyrating in Ed Bannack's arms. How graceful Ellen was! How calm and dignified even in this violent dance!

Presently she again found herself dancing with Campan. How she loathed the man! But she had felt a vindictive joy when Campan had entered the hotel. Fiercely she had yearned for an opportunity to show Lannon that she didn't care, that she was indifferent to his slights. And when Campan had so quickly acted upon her bold suggestion that he escort her to the barbecue, she had seen Lannon glance at her with cold disapproval. That had been a delicious moment!

But there had been no delicious moments since. So far the evening had been one long-dragging period of torturous agony, of passionate self-reproaches, of hideous jealousy. She got little satisfaction out of the knowledge that Lannon knew she had come here with Campan. She had seen Lannon watching her at times when she knew he was not aware that she was looking at him, and she had seen that he was studying her, appraising her, condemning her! And in her heart she knew there was cause for his condemnation. For Campan

had a bad reputation in the valley, and by being seen with him she was provoking talk which would do much toward destroying her own reputation.

When the quadrille ended she found herself standing against the wall near the big door that opened into a three-sided *patio*. Campan left her, pleading that he needed air, though not inviting her to take it with him. She saw him go out of another door with Ed Bannack, Devake and another man whom she knew as Tulerosa; and she knew well enough that the whisky in the bunk-house was what attracted them.

Most of the men had been outside several times, and the evening was not more than two hours gone. Once when the fiddler was forced to send for men to make up the necessary number of couples for a dance he had betrayed his knowledge of what had lured the men from the dancing:

"Thet bar'ell won't hold out long at this rate!"

There were few men in the big room now. These were married men yielding to wifely domination.

"No; you ain't goin' out there again, Henry," Gloria heard a woman say. "I'm goin' home about midnight an' I don't want no drunken man drivin' me."

The heat had grown oppressive. The fiddler, seated in a chair on an improvised platform at the farther end of the big room, was tuning his instrument. A mother was haranguing a child. The curtains of the windows hung motionless. Men were mopping the perspiration from their faces; women were fanning themselves with handkerchiefs; the big swinging lamp suspended from the ceiling of the big room was vitiating the atmosphere.

Gloria moved closer to the pig door that opened upon the *patio*. A cool breeze fanned her cheeks and she gratefully turned to it, glancing into the court.

Benson had placed four bracket lamps in convenient corners of the *patio*, and though they glowed dimly in contrast with the bright illumination of the big room, there was still light enough to show Gloria the floor of the *patio*, and the benches which Benson had placed about for the convenience of his guests.

The open side of the *patio* faced the big door in which Gloria stood. The four lamps outside revealed the rugged outlines of the walls of the ranch-house, some open windows, several doors. The black darkness of the desert night drew a somber curtain across the open side of the court, illuminated by countless coldly glittering stars.

Refreshed by the cool breeze, Gloria moved to the side of the door and leaned against the wall. A woman standing near her spoke to her, but she answered mechanically, for she saw Lannon coming toward her. She stared past him to the other side of the room, where she saw Ellen Bosworth talking with a tall, picturesque young cowboy.

Lannon did not seem to see Gloria. He strode to the big doorway, glanced out, turned his back to the *patio* and stood on the threshold watching the fiddler.

Gloria's hatred of Lannon leaped within her like a living flame. He was adding to his other crimes against her by completely ignoring her. How conspicuous he was, standing there! How cool, easy, assured! The other men in their civilian clothing were rough, ill-dressed, uncouth. They seemed like wild men in their unaccustomed garb. They were nervous, ill at ease. Lannon wore his clothing unconsciously; he looked as though it belonged to him, had been made for him.

Gloria granted him the tribute of her admiration as she watched him with covert glances; there was about him an intangible something that impressed; a greatness that made itself felt despite the hatred she bore for him; a compelling force that was not to be resisted. But beneath her admiration was a malice, a wild rage, an eagerness to stir him out of his cool, easy imperturbability, to strike a spark of passion in him, to rouse him to the point of betraying the primitive impulses that lay behind the smooth, hard mask of his cold placidity. She wanted to test him; she fiercely hoped that before the evening was much older Devake or Campan or Tulerosa or Ed Bannock would clash with him. She wanted to see him humbled, punished, his greatness destroyed. Two or three times during the dancing she had seen Campan

and Devake and Tulerosa watching him with odd intentness; and once she had noted a cold sneer on Ed Bannack's face. Devake, she knew, would strike sooner or later. Devake was not the man to forget or forgive.

She looked full at Lannon, smiling into his eyes with contemptuous scorn. She had felt that he was staring at her. Her gaze fell quickly, for she saw a heavy Colt behind Lannon, the muzzle denting his coat at a point just above the hips, a rigid arm behind it. Vaguely outlined on the floor of the big room, extending across the threshold from the *patio*, was the shadow of a man—the man who held the Colt.

Lannon returned her gaze and she saw derision in his eyes, and cold contempt. It was plain he felt she was linked with the death behind him, that she had known he was to be attacked from that direction. His glance did not accuse her, however; it merely said that he might have expected nothing more from her.

She moved to the jamb and saw men in the *patio*—Devake, standing rigid behind Lannon, holding the gun that was pressed against Lannon's back; Campan a few feet distant; Tulerosa and Bannack near by.

She heard Devake's voice, directed at Lannon's back. Devake was so close to Lannon that he might to all appearances be merely whispering to him. That, Gloria divined, was to mislead any one in the big room who might chance to look toward the door.

"Just move back easy, Lannon, slow like, as if you was doing it natural," said Devake. "If there's any interference I'm blowing you apart."

"Certainly," returned Lannon coldly; "anything to oblige."

Two or three steps backward he took carelessly, slowly, as though while having grown tired of the dancing, he was still interested in what was going on in the big room. He still held Gloria's gaze with a cold, derisive smile.

Then his face seemed to disappear, as though it had been blotted out in the darkness. Came to Gloria's ears the sound of scuffling feet on the stone floor of the *patio*; she saw a whirling blot of figures just be-

yond the doorway; saw one man go reeling headlong toward the farther side of the court, to fall in a heap near the wall; she saw Campan draw his gun, heard its thunderous report; saw its crimson lance flame shoot upward and outward into the star-dotted wall of darkness on the open side of the patio.

In the glare of a bracket lamp were Campan and Lannon. They were close together, locked, straining. Tulerosa and Bannack were running around them with drawn guns, evidently trying to shoot Lannon, but baffled by the man's swift movements.

The men were cursing, blaspheming, and the high heels of their boots striking the stone floor of the patio made sinister music. Half a dozen times the light from the bracket lamp flickered on Campan's gun, and once more the patio rocked with the thunderous report of the weapon, the three walls throwing the sound back and forth in diminishing crashes. This time the red flame streak was shorter, smothered.

Behind Gloria had grown a press of human bodies, mostly women, who shrieked at what they saw in the patio. Gloria had made no sound. She stood at the door jamb, holding tightly to it, watching with blazing eyes and sinking heart.

She felt a commotion behind her, felt a plunging body force its way through the press behind her, and come to a halt at her side on the threshold. A big, thunderous voice boomed; she saw a tall, bold, bronzed man standing beside her, crouching, with two heavy guns rigid in his hands.

"Drop them guns, you buzzard's whelps!"

The newcomer was terrible in the cold rage that gripped him. The moving blot of men in the patio split up into three units. Two figures still struggled under the bracket lamp, but two others moved a little distance and stood, their guns sheathed, their hands raised, staring into the muzzles of the newcomer's guns.

Rapid, like lightning flashes, had been every movement in the patio; and it seemed to Gloria that a dozen pulse beats would have sufficed to mark the time that had elapsed since she had seen Lannon backing

out of the doorway, until now, when she saw him, close to Campan, drive a clenched fist upward to the other's jaw.

The sound strikingly resembled that which might be made by slapping the surface of water with a flat board. Campan's head seemed to thud against the wall of the ranch-house; another flame streak stabbed upward over Lannon's shoulder. And then Campan slumped to the patio floor and lay flat on his back, his face upturned under the bracket lamp, his heavy pistol lying close to his outspread fingers. Lannon turned to face the door. A strange light leaped to his eyes when he saw the tall man with the big guns who held Tulerosa and Bannack to his will.

"Perrin!"

"Shore, you're right, Lannon," said the tall man. "It's me. Stand right thar an' I'll give you the straight of this hyar affair. It's mighty short an' sweet. I struck hyar not fifteen minutes ago, turned my hoss in the corral, an' busted for the whisky barrel. Gettin' close to the bunk-house, I saw these hyar pizen skunks thar. They was just comin' out, an' I didn't want to meet 'em. I slipped around a corner an' heard 'em talkin'. I heard 'em say they was goin' to frame Lannon—was goin' to plant a gun on him after shootin' him. Thet meant you, though I knowed you was not due till to-morrow.

"I seen them skunks go toward the house, an' I went in to the barrel an' got my drink. Not until after I'd got the drink did it strike me thet mebbe you'd got in ahead of time. Then I busted in hyar lookin' for you. An' hyar's them skunks tryin' to salivate you!" Perrin's voice rose; the big guns in his hands moved convulsively. "Damn yore hides, I'm goin' to bore you!"

He stepped into the patio, crouching; the guns steady, rigid. Behind him women screamed. Tulerosa and Bannack were backing away, staring as though fascinated at the terrible figure that menaced them.

"Perrin, I'm thanking you. You showed up just in time. But I'm finishing this deal myself. Let those two sneaks off, and put Devake on his horse. I pick Campan as the man who framed this deal."

The light from the bracket lamp shone in Lannon's face, which was pallid, the lips curved in a bitter smile. The lamplight showed dancing flecks of yellow fire in his eyes.

"You're right, boss," answered Perrin. "Campan's the man. An' he's the guy which is headin' the damned outfit which has been raisin' hell in the valley. Take care of him if you want to. I'm doin' as you say about these hyar skunks!"

Perrin moved forward. A dozen men, sweeping toward him out of the darkness of the open side of the patio, surrounded him and his captives. Other men carried Devake. All disappeared into the black void outside the court.

There were many other men slipping out of the big door into the patio. Women, too, pressed forward, driven by curiosity.

Lannon watched Perrin and the other men escort Tulerosa and Bannack out of the patio; he saw more men carry Devake away. Then he turned, stooped, and reached for Campan's gun, which was lying just beyond the latter's reach on the stones of the patio floor.

Something bumped into him; a hand flashed out and seized the weapon. Lannon straightened, to see Gloria Stowe standing rigid and defiant before him, the gun gripped tightly in both hands as though she feared he might attempt to take it from her.

Her eyes were deep pools of scorn and contempt. Those were the emotions he saw at first. But as he continued to hold her gaze he saw something more, swimming deep—a wanton light that expressed hatred, cold mockery; that challenged his manhood.

As he stood looking at her Campan began to get to his feet. He stood, leaning against the wall of the ranch-house, his legs asprawl to hold his balance, his hands hanging at his sides, his chin on his chest as he dizzily watched Gloria and Lannon.

Her gaze unwavering, her lips stiff and white, Gloria "broke." Campan's gun. Three empty, smoke-blackened shells she selected from the six that fell into her hand, tossing them one by one to the floor of the patio, where they rang and clinked me-

tallically. Three loaded cartridges, the brass shining in the light from the lamp, she still held, and looked at them with a strange smile as she handed them to Lannon. The gun she held behind her.

"Stranger," she said tauntingly, "you have made your play. According to your reputation, you've got nerve. Folks say you used to run this valley. You've got no gun now, but I reckon you can get one. Hyeh's three shells to help you fill it. You can't kill Campan now, because his gun ain't loaded, and I've got it. But I reckon Campan won't pull his freight out of the country just because you've come into it. He'll be facing you some day when you've both guns in your hands. I've been wonderin' if a man who will try to make a fool of a girl will have the nerve to face Campan on an equal footing!"

She laughed jeeringly, stepped back a little, breathing fast; the heave of her bosom and the throbbing of her throat told Lannon of her passion.

Lannon laughed, stepped close to her and whispered.

"I'm giving Campan my answer," he said. "Listen!"

He walked to where Campan stood, now more erect. Lannon's face was set and white, and he held the three brass cartridges in the palm of his right hand until he saw Campan's gaze drop to them.

"Campan, here's three shells from your gun—loaded. Gloria Stowe gave them to me. Now listen—hard! I'm giving them back to you, one at a time, when you've got a gun on you. But I'm giving you a chance. You can leave the country or you can quit wearing a gun.

"The first time I meet you when you've got a gun on you I'm going to spoil that smooth mug of yours so that no girl will ever want to look at it again. The second time I catch you wearing a gun I'll cripple you; and the third time I'll kill you!"

He stared hard at Campan, dropped the three brass shells into a pocket of his coat. Then he walked to where Gloria stood, bowed to her and passed on, striding toward the door that led into the big room, men and women stepping out of his path as he went and staring silently after him.

On the threshold of the doorway he paused and stood for an instant, holding hard to one of the door jambs, swaying oddly back and forth.

Then, slowly, as though tired, he sank to a sitting posture, his hands on the floor

at his side, bracing his body, his chin sagging to his chest.

Benson reached him first; his voice boomed loudly.

"Hell's fire!" he said. "He's shot! Bored plumb through!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Necklace of Heaven



by S. Gordon Gurwit

Author of "Other Men's Wives," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

AT twenty-one, Tom Harcourt received his modest inheritance. By the time he had graduated from Harvard—which was exactly two years later—he had spent half of it.

After his graduation, he occupied a chair and a desk in the famous law firm of Graham, Cootes, Levy, Watshoff and Graham. It was dry, musty, indoor work, not at all to the liking of the crack college athlete who was regarded as one of the best and fastest halfbacks of his day, and who, despite his two-hundred pounds, could cover a hundred yards in ten and one-fifth seconds.

He had pictured the law as an exciting occupation—crowded court rooms, and exciting murder trials—but instead, he searched abstracts of title and filed briefs.

Then he met Beatrice Foster, and Tom fell desperately in love with her.

When the war came, they parted very

tenderly and swore eternal love for one another; but what Tom failed to note was that the lovely blue eyes could flash electrically, and at times held the avarice of a Harpagon.

When he returned, he found her married to a rich, elderly gentleman, who had made a fortune in "war-brides." To his astonishment he found that he did not greatly care; he felt no heart-break. There was some natural pique and some cynical amusement; then he easily and promptly forgot about her.

Yes, the two years in France had made a difference. He looked with distaste upon resuming his interrupted career of the law. The indoors, somehow, was unthinkable.

Then Fate—most capricious of all coquettes—took a hand.

He received a letter from his former room-mate at Harvard, whom he also counted as his best friend. The letter was

post-marked: "Cairo, Egypt." It apprised him of the facts that his friend was in Cairo managing some of the tobacco farms that supplied tobacco for his father's enormous cigarette enterprise; that the country was "Great!" That it was fascinating, and wound up by saying, by way of a joke, that if Tom was tired of the law and would come to Egypt, he could get a position in his friend's office, and wouldn't they—just *couldn't* they—paint old Cairo a vivid scarlet together!

The gypsy drop in Tom's blood stirred. He went to the window of his hotel room and looked down upon Broadway, with its crawling, ant-like thousands. The disagreeable dissonance of the great commercial mart was repugnant to him, with its jarring over- and under-tones.

He had some money, and he pictured Cairo. The very name, called up all the coloring of Harun-al-Rashid; the red-hot afterglow of African skies; grave Arabs dropping on their squares of carpet to pray; henna-tipped fingers drawing the envious veil close; shadowy Orientals gliding into the open doors of the mosques, while mauve shadows wove a picture of Islamism.

Egypt! Where history was cradled! Where the sun had once looked down upon the iron brood of Hamilcar and the legions of Scipio; where Herodotus had mused under the shadowy foliage and Cleopatra had wandered under the palm aisles of her rose gardens—the Phœnicia whose loveliness had once flashed in the sea-mirrored sun with its feathery palms over jeweled arabesques and mosques of snowy gleam; where once verses of the Koran had been traced by reverent hands along porphyry cornices and capitals of jasper.

Egypt! The land of eternal mystery—still untouched by the march of progress; still dim, Oriental, alluring. Under the arid soil, the legions of two thousand centuries; Carthaginian and Byzantine, are dust, side by side, and above is still the same land with its subtle allure.

Tom stirred uneasily. Broadway had faded from his sight. An insistent call was in his blood—the still, small voice of heredity speaking in his veins—the roving blood of a great-grandfather who had sailed the

seven seas in his Yankee clipper. Here, the bleak, cold Northern winter was coming. He hated its dirty slush, its searching rawness. The land of the lotus called—and he answered.

He arranged his affairs, made his few adieus and stepped from the bleakness of New York to the insidious sunshine of Cairo.

For six months the two friends lived together and steeped themselves in the colorful life about them; then Tom's friend was recalled by his father to take charge of the New York office, and Tom, who had invested his capital in a cotton venture, went down the Nile to inspect it. It proved a fiasco. He lost every penny invested.

He returned to Cairo to seek a position in his friend's office. He found that the new manager could not find a place for him. Pride forbade him to take the matter further, so he obtained a position bossing a gang of natives on a tobacco plantation. This lasted several months.

Then began a period of infrequent employment. He drifted from place to place, and as the months went by, he tasted deeply of what we call, with beautiful generality, "Life." It was a very illuminating postgraduate course.

His existence was frugal; he never had much money, but it never occurred to him to go back to the States and resume his profession. The taint of Oriental life was in his blood. The past was forgotten. He had eaten of the lotus.

Thus we find him sitting in front of the Café Chantant in Algiers, jingling his last few francs in his pocket in a blissful, contented lethargy, while he eyed the fantastic confusion of its streets; the incongruous blending of many races that touched and mingled, but never assimilated.

The sun was sinking, and from the minarets came the shrill call of muezzin—he heard it as in a dream, the repeated "*La 'laha ill' Allah*—" while from the cafés came ribald chansons. The Moorish and Bedouin beauties, eyes gleaming through *yashmak*, rubbed elbows with staff officers a-glitter with crosses. Hawk-eyed Arabs in white *bermousse*, that sometimes revealed the gleam of jeweled dagger hilts;

desert patriarchs, majestic as Moses, read papers; cafés and cigar stores were filling; music came from the dance-halls; here and there a tourist sought the bazaars. In the distance the Kabyl Mountains lay in a purple haze, topped by the azure of the heavens. Then, swiftly, the sun sank, and the star-studded African night fell.

Tom fingered his francs. They were few, but something would turn up. Something always did. And one must eat. He was hungry, so he entered the café and ordered a humble meal of sheep's liver and *cous-cousbu*.

And while he ate, Professor Anthony and his daughter, together with several other white sightseers, entered the café in a party, took seats and ordering refreshments, watched the Kabyl girl who danced upon a raised platform.

Then, that capricious coquette, Fate, seeing the stage set to her satisfaction, doubtless smiled and left the participants of the drama to work out the conclusion.

II.

BESS ANTHONY—the professor's daughter—noted Tom first. His breadth of shoulder, sun-tanned face and flaxen hair compelled interest. She turned to her father and called his attention to the young man who was eating and reading his *Presse* so absorbedly.

"Either English or American," she said; "and evidently a resident. Perhaps he can help you, dad."

Professor Anthony, a small, keen-looking, shriveled man, adjusted his glasses properly and looked at Tom.

"Yes—perhaps," he answered. "He reminds me of my younger brother, Arthur. Twenty years ago, Arthur looked like that—he was a handsome youngster—bless my soul! How time flies! I wonder what ever became of him."

"Haven't you ever heard, dad?"

"No—never a word. He simply left home and disappeared. When that young man finishes his dinner, I'll go over and see if I can get some information from him."

The girl regarded Tom with a naïve, direct look that was still innocent of the eter-

nal war of the sexes. She thought him handsome. He was. You've seen his type in the lobby of the Ritz or the Plaza, or perhaps on the avenue.

And at that moment, Tom looked up and saw the girl. His fork stopped halfway to his mouth and his eyes grew round with a rare amazement. The girl was undeniably lovely, gracefully molded, and the kittenish witchery of adolescence gave her an indescribable charm. At his direct look, her eyes dropped and an auroral flush tinted lip and cheek faintly.

"Well—I'll be eternally—" began Tom, to his soul, and failed miserably. "I'm dreaming! I'll wake up in a minute and find it was a mirage. It *can't* be! They don't make 'em so beautiful any more!"

Whereupon he lost his usually fine appetite and looked at her whenever the opportunity offered without directly being rude and staring. Several times he surprised her eyes upon him. Experienced amatory diplomatist though he was, skilled tactician in many an *affaire du cœur*, a vague pulse began to thrill somewhere in his being. Later, when her father arose and walked toward Tom, that young man experienced a sinking sensation, for he anticipated a rebuke for staring.

Professor Anthony halted at Tom's table, looked over the top of his glasses and said, pleasantly:

"Pardon my intrusion, sir, but could I presume upon you to give me some information? You are a resident, I take it, and possibly you can help me out—if you will. Allow me to introduce myself."

He extended a card which informed Tom that the owner was Professor B. A. Anthony, and there was a line of degrees after the name strung out like a caravan.

Tom arose with alacrity, his heart pounding at the thought of possibly meeting the girl. He gave his name, they shook hands, and he motioned the professor to the seat opposite.

"Entirely at your service, professor," he said. "I'm not exactly a resident, but I know the country. If I can serve you in any way, command me."

The professor shot him a keen look.

"May I ask if you are English?"

"No," smiled Tom, "American."

"Indeed? I'm delighted to meet a fellow countryman, sir!"

Again they shook hands briefly.

"I am," continued the professor, "as you can see from my card, an archaeologist. I intend to go up-country, near Insola, and I wanted to hire some young white man to accompany me. Do you know of any perfectly trustworthy person whom you could recommend? One who has lived here for some time, knows the country, and, preferably, who knows some Arabic?"

"I do," answered Tom, promptly. "You're looking right at him!"

The professor smiled slightly, his keen eyes searching Tom through and through. Finally he sniffed, and the smile deepened.

"If you're in earnest," he said, "I think you'll do. What qualifications have you?"

"These," Tom told him: "I'm an attorney—Harvard—and I can argue with any natives in three kinds of bastard Arabic. Outside of that, I need a job, and I can shoot straight with either hand!"

The professor's eyes twinkled.

"You'll do," he said. "I'm glad I happened to talk to you this evening."

Tom glanced for the briefest instant at the girl.

"Not half as glad as I am," he answered.

"Would you care to tell me," went on the little man, "how you happen to be here? You see, if we are to be together, something definite—"

"Certainly!" laughingly interrupted Tom. "Gladly, sir." Swiftly, he sketched his career, named his family, his arrival, his investments, his losses, while the professor nodded understandingly. "But," wound up Tom, "we two can't go alone. We'll need a guard—several men. Some of the desert tribes are always on the war-path."

"I believe we'll have to go alone," said the professor, quietly. "I have information regarding the ruins of an ancient Saharan city, hidden by the sands. I don't want to attract attention to my search until it proves successful, then I can bring men out. Of course, if there's danger, and you wish to retract—"

"Professor!" interrupted Tom, sternly.

"Take another look at me. Do you think you want to finish that sentence?"

Again the professor's eyes twinkled. He reached across the table impulsively, and again they shook hands, this time with a better mutual understanding and respect.

And so it was settled. The girl was to stay in Algiers with some friends and await her father's return. Professor Anthony thought they would be gone for three or four months.

They began to assemble the necessities for their caravan, and sent them on to D'Jillab, where they were to buy their camels and start the journey. The days were filled with preparation and plans; and at night Tom and the professor would talk. A great friendship and mutual liking grew between them.

"Once," the professor was saying, "there were forests and rivers, lakes and cities where the desert now is. Now they are all gone—under the shifting sands. A few, perhaps, are partly uncovered, and I hope to find one of them. The cities are of great antiquity. The desert has a fascinating history—it hides many things. Egyptology furnishes us with a clew—"

But Tom was not listening. His eyes were glued upon Bess, who sat by the open Moorish window, her great, amber-tinted eyes dreaming over the slopes of the hills where terraced gardens and white cupolas thrust high lights from out their wild-olive shadows. She drank in the languor of the African night, moon-bewitched, as her eyes wandered over the heights where Italian pines and feathery palms grew side by side. She felt Tom's eyes upon her, and it seemed to her that he must hear the beating of her heart, so loud it was.

Tom sat in silent worship. A week he had known her, yet he loved her with a passion that startled even himself. He had known other beautiful girls before, girls whose eyes had looked into his with charming naïveté, the look of a child in which, somehow, there lurked the wisdom of the ages and the boredom of satiety.

In Bess he found a girl innocent of all emotion—the ideal he had subconsciously erected. He wanted to be the first to gaze upon a feminine heart that was like a deep,

unruffled lake; to be the first to drop the pearl of life and knowledge to the crystal depths; to awaken her from her adolescent sleep. He used to tell himself that once—just once—he wanted to look into a girl's eyes and find dreams in them—not just a pretty masquerade or assumed naïveté. And Bess was more than he had pictured.

When they parted to go to D'Jillab the girl's eyes were wet as she kissed her father.

"Take good care of yourself, daddy dear, please—for my sake," she whispered tremulously. She gave her hand to Tom silently, and bravely met his eyes, so that he saw, deep in their brown glory, enough to thrill his soul. He suddenly bent and kissed her hand as a knight of other centuries saluted his queen; then she fled to her room.

The professor cleared his throat noisily, and laid a hand on Tom's arm as they left the house.

"I suspect," he said dryly, "that you'd better take good care of yourself, too."

Tom said nothing in answer. He could not; he was too exalted, and his heart was in his mouth at the time.

At D'Jillab they bought camels and crept out into the tawny desert, where they traveled day after day in the blinding, yellow heat.

The professor consulted his maps and took their bearings, and was cheerful and uncomplaining. Unused to the hardships and the country, though, he suffered greatly.

Two weeks later, nearing their objective, on the borders of a waterless oasis, they met a wandering tribe of Zoukieff Arabs, who greeted them.

"*Es-solâm 'alechum, sidi?*" called the leader.

"*Es-alechum solâm,*" answered Tom.

The Arabs approached and demanded *bakshish*.

The professor calmly and coolly refused. Whereupon the Arabs threatened, and the professor got his rifle.

"I can't speak their bastard Arabic, Tom," he said quietly; "but you tell them that if they molest us or try to plunder us, I'll shoot!"

The Arabs understood his gesture if not his words. They shot first, and the professor crumpled up and fell, a bullet in his shoulder. The next shot killed one of their camels.

With a furious oath Tom threw himself down behind the camel and opened fire. He tumbled the chief out of his saddle, and the accuracy of his fire kept them from rushing him.

Then began a siege that lasted all day, each side firing at intervals. During the night Tom managed to pack the professor upon a camel and make their escape. He took all the water they had—a canteen full—and left the balance of their caravan to the Arabs.

They traveled all night, following the stars, the professor at times delirious, for there was no more water, and his wound was swelling and turning purple. In the morning Tom redressed the wound, and they pushed on, striking back toward D'Jillab. As the furnace heat of the day came it began to look dubious, and a dreadful fear clutched at Tom's heart, for the professor was again delirious and raved about his little girl and his wound; and if he died who would take care of her?

"For God's sake, hold on a bit longer!" Tom begged desperately. "The camel is twitching the slits of his nose as if he smells water. Hold on, professor—we'll find it and rest a while, then we'll make D'Jillab."

The little man looked at him blankly, and Tom's heart was torn with agony, for even in so short a time he loved him as a son loves a father.

Toward noon the camel guided them to a circular group of date palms and stopped in their meager shadow.

The professor became quieter as Tom helped him from the beast's back. He seemed rational and sat down upon a stone to rest.

"It's the end, Tom," he said slowly. "I feel it. I can't go on. You alone will make it. Better not handicap yourself—"

Tom interrupted him fiercely, the professor smiling faintly at his undoubted devotion; then a change came over the little man; he grew delirious again and babbled of water and lakes and his wound, until

a violent hemorrhage sent him off into a spasm of coughing.

Driven to desperation, Tom shot the camel and cut into him like a madman to obtain the water cells of his stomach. There was little fluid in them, but it helped the wounded man, and he closed his eyes in a fevered sleep.

Tom threw himself down and lay inert, chained by the overpoweringly sultry oppression.

As far as the eye could see, it was all a parched, boundless, unendurable glitter of burning sand and brazen sky. Shimmering heat devils danced everywhere. As he lay his brain raced with plans he knew to be futile, and he shut his eyes in a vivid fury as a mirage began to form of a palm-fringed lake.

It was maddening—a fantastic mockery of the savage desert to rack the souls of the sufferers in its insatiable clutches.

Eyes closed to keep out the torturing vision, utterly exhausted, frantic with thirst, Tom dozed fitfully, and was awakened by the professor's voice, excited, normal:

"Tom! Tom!"

III.

DAZED, he sat up. The professor was pointing to a stone covered with strange, faint markings. His eyes were round and staring.

"The camel knew!" he said faintly, his face twisted with pain, though his eyes glowed excitedly. "There's a hidden well here—says so on the stone—lots of them in the desert—dig directly under that big palm—toward me about two feet—that's ancient Berber writing—"

Tom's incredulous stare was followed by swift action. He dug feverishly for hours in the spot where the professor had indicated, and after torturing toil—for the sand was as mobile as water and ran back into the excavation—he found the well, covered with crossed palm trunks, over which were laid hides and rugs, and over all, the sand. It lay in a depression, and had been covered with sand for centuries, every wind adding its strata of covering.

But there was little water in it. He managed to get enough to appease their

thirst and to bathe the professor's wound, which was flaming with fever. Then they both lay mute, motionless, stricken, the professor's restless eyes searching the stones again.

"Queer!" he muttered, forgetting his grievous hurt in the scholar's frenzy. "Queer! According to this, we are the first to uncover the well since the sixteenth century! Think of it! What's this? Great heavens, Tom! Dig at the foot of that third palm tree—quick! There's treasure here!"

Again Tom, excited, using the stock of his carbine, began to shift the sands, and was finally rewarded with a small cedar chest, bound in copper, which he broke open with his rifle.

It contained two strings of matched pearls—but such pearls! Big as robin's eggs, with the soft irradiance of opalescent waters, round and perfect, untouched by time or surroundings—a princely fortune; gems fit for a maharajah; for the crown of a Cleopatra! There was also a parchment, which the professor seized avidly.

"*'The Khalifa's Necklace of Heaven,'*" babbled the professor, greatly excited at his find. "So it says here, Tom—'*Bestowed by the Khalif of Zir upon Eadmée, his wife*'—she is buried here, too, Tom—'*as a token of his undying love. No other may wear the Necklace of Heaven but Eadmée, the Rose from the Garden of Allah, for this would be displeasing in the sight of Allah. There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His prophet.*'"

The professor had another spasm of coughing, then continued excitedly as Tom held him:

"Tom, my son, we've found the most famous necklace in Arabian history! This story of Eadmée and her Necklace of Heaven has been known for hundreds of years—it's a legend. One string for you, boy, and one for Bess! You must make it now, Tom—you must! This will be Bess's heritage—there is very little else, and you'll look after her, won't you—"

His throat convulsed with an agony that seemed to tear his frame asunder; his tortured chest struggled for breath, and the hemorrhage came. Frantic, Tom did what he could and watched the little man smile

bravely when it subsided. The hemorrhage seemed to relieve him.

"Now," whispered the professor, "it's over. Lay me down, Tom. I'm exhausted. Perhaps we'll be able to push on later at night, but I don't think so. The bullet struck my lungs, Tom. But promise me, Tom, that if—anything happens, you'll push on and give Bess her necklace? If I fall, don't wait for me—it will be useless. You love her, don't you? You'll take care—"

His head dropped, but he determinedly, bravely held it up; his eyes smiled into those of his comrade in their adventure, while his hand sought Tom's.

"Our Father—" he murmured, then sighed. Slowly the smiling eyes closed, brave to the end with a heroism unsuspected in the undeveloped, shriveled body. He was dead.

For hours Tom could hear or see nothing, nor bring himself to leave. The broken, useless body of his friend was dear to him still; it was the last remains of the bravest and best beloved friend he had found in this country. He had a wild idea that he would carry the professor's body back to D'Jillab; but out of his great grief sanity came to him.

He buried the professor by the side of Eadmée, the Rose of Allah's Garden, and set a stone to mark the spot; then, putting both necklaces in his pocket, he took up his carbine and stumbled off across the sands toward the north. His senses were wheeling in a disordered riot; he was numbed with grief before the tragedy that is always new.

Three days later, more dead than alive, a trading caravan found him and brought him to D'Jillab. He did not rest a moment, but sold one pearl to a native gem merchant—for he had no money—then he set out immediately for Algiers and Bess. The native gem merchant examined the pearl with sharp, amazed eyes that glittered at the bargain he had driven; then he closed his bazaar and followed the mad Roumi, whom, he suspected, had more of the big pearls.

"As Allah is great," he muttered into his beard, "I believe the dog of a Roumi has

found the Necklace of Heaven—for he came from the desert, and there are no pearls such as he had but those of Eadmée. If this should be—" His eyes glittered dangerously. "An unbelievable fortune! I must find out! Sacrilege! The eater of swine!"

IV.

WHEN Tom reached Algiers, gaunt, weary, heartsick, it was night, the blue, luminous dusk of the Mediterranean shores. He went at once to the house where Bess was staying with friends, and in the ancient Moorish court, seated near the oval fountain with its maiden-hair fern and arum lilies, he told her, as gently as he could, what had happened.

She cried out once, then went deathly white, the wan moonlight showing her anguish and heartbreak. Finally the tears came, and she sobbed as women have sobbed over their dead since time immemorial.

And somehow her head found his shoulder and his arms went about her as he murmured encouragement and sympathy. It was some time before he could proceed and tell her the rest of the story—of the hidden well; the cedar chest with its pearls. He gave them to her, all of them save a few which he retained to sell so he could realize some immediate funds. He told her of her father's wish; that they each keep one necklace, but he proposed to give her most of his, so her future would be free of any suggestion of financial worries.

"Your father would have wished it," he murmured. "He guessed that I love you better than life—or my hope of heaven. One string you will keep intact, and the balance of the other you can dispose of readily. I'm going to take you back home to the States, Bess; I'm going to see you safely home. Some day I hope you will let me ask you—a certain question, dear, and let me take care of you always."

"Perhaps—some day," she said, her voice trailing upward and breaking with the sweet, wistful grace note of a child. "Not too soon—after—after—" Her lips trembled piteously.

She looked so weary, so stricken, so hurt, that Tom's heart was bruised in her anguish.

It was nearly midnight when he left her; then she insisted that he retain one necklace, as her father had wished.

"Mine I shall keep always as a last gift from him," she whispered.

And when Tom swung out of the courtyard bound for his lodgings a silent native figure slipped out of the shadows of bougainvillæa that clung to the arcades, and followed him.

"Dog of an unbeliever!" grated the shadow as he followed Tom. "Now I have heard with my own ears and seen with my own eyes. The Roumi has the Necklace of Heaven! First to recover his—the girl's will be easy!"

In the week that followed Tom did not see much of Bess. She was grief-stricken; her loss was too new to even allow her to find any solace in his devotion. She begged to go home as quickly as he could take her, and he assented at once. They prepared to sail on the first steamer available at Gibraltar; first to England, then home, for few direct passages could be had.

Tom decided to part with another of his pearls, as he needed the money. His first sale had brought him little, but he took what he could get so he could return to Algiers.

Now he wanted to get a fair price, so he would have some available money to see him through to the States. He went to Tunis to make the second sale.

And always a native figure followed at his heels, but he knew nothing of it. A few days after his return from Tunis he found an elegantly dressed, ruddy-complexioned Englishman waiting for him at his lodgings.

"Mr. Harcourt?" he inquired pleasantly.

Tom nodded, puzzled, and the stranger went on:

"I'm Charles Martin, sir—of the firm of Trowbridge, Williams & Martin, London. I happened to stroll into my friend's bazaar in Tunis—Ben-Ali Dushoff—and he showed me a pearl that he'd bought from you and gave me your address here. He

thought you might have others. I'm looking for fine pearls for my firm."

He tendered his card, and Tom eyed it. "Why—I don't know," he answered slowly. "I have—two others like the one I sold." He did not care to confess ownership of the balance.

"Ah—may I see them? I'm prepared to offer you the highest prices per grain for good pearls, sir."

Tom showed him two pearls, and the expert radiated.

"Why, sir!" he exclaimed, as he examined them and weighed them in his hand. "They're marvelous! Perfect, too! Finest I've ever seen. These two are worth at least five thousand pounds apiece."

"What?"

"I'll give you ten thousand pounds for the two," smiled the other, noting the astonishment on Tom's features.

"Sold!" said Tom, catching his breath. If two were worth fifty thousand dollars, what were the balance worth?

"Good! I naturally haven't that much money with me," went on Martin, "but I'll send for it. How long will you be here, sir?"

"Why," answered Tom, "we'll be here for a few days only; then we go to Tangier, where we are taking ship at Gibraltar for home."

"Well," said the other, his eyes sparkling, "here's fifty pounds deposit on the two pearls—that's so I have an option, sir. I'll go with you to Tangier and I'll wire immediately to have the draft sent me there so we can complete the transaction before you sail."

"Done!" said Tom, accepting the deposit. "Wait a moment and I'll write you a receipt."

And so Martin went with Bess and Tom to Tangier, a lively, chatty, shrewd man, interesting, suave, a graduate of the world and its ways, and one of the greatest scoundrels unhung in northern Africa. He played only for big stakes, and he played carefully.

V.

Across the narrow strip of water sounded the sunset gun of Gibraltar, its echoes

bellowing down the Straits; the weird dusk fell swiftly, faintly illumined by a wan moon that would later dip an eerie, white veneer upon Tangier.

As the evening fell, the lighthouse above Tarifa flashed into being suddenly, like a live topaz. The narrow streets of Tangier grew livelier; the lights in the bazaar flared up, seemingly all at once, as if called by the wand of some master magician; white-robed figures in flowing *bernouse*, picturesque *tarboosh* and *jillab* began to populate the winding streets.

On the *Socco Chico*, in front of a squalid little bazaar, sat a cadaverous figure, dressed in the garments of Europe. He wore no collar, and his shirt was open at the throat. Chair tilted against the white wall, he viewed the white-robed strollers from beneath shaggy eyebrows that failed to conceal the restless, ratty eyes.

The Barbary night crept on, tawny, mysterious, a faint breeze springing up from the Mediterranean that held the taint of drench and brine and bilge water. The cafés and coffee houses blossomed brightly forth along the Paseo de Cenarro, garbed with diadems of jeweled lamps. From the interiors of the larger cafés came music—barbaric music, yet pleasing and rhythmic to European ears—the shrill wail of haut boys, the plaint of a *shibabah*, the thrill of muted Berber drums.

A native figure separated itself from the passers-by and stood before the European. "*Sidi*," the native murmured, "a word with you."

The European stirred instantly, arose, and answered: "Come inside, Saad."

He led the way into the bazaar, the native following.

"There is much work for to-night, *sidi*," went on the native in an excited whisper. "The Sidi Martin is with a Roumi who carries many pearls. They will be in the Café d'Or on the Paseo de Cenarro soon. I saw the pearls with my own eyes in a bazaar of the Sok Attarin, in Tunis. I have been near him since he sold me the first pearl when he came out of the desert at D'Jillab. I would have had them ere this—but he is big, like a tree, and crafty. So you are to get the Sidi Walters."

"I see, Saad. Anything else?"

"The time is short. He has planned to sail from Gibraltar to-morrow. We must strike at once—to-night. He is one of two Englishmen who went searching in the desert for ruins of ancient cities, and they found instead the tomb of Eadmée—and her Necklace of Heaven!"

"You have heard, *sidi*? It is an old story and a true one, for I heard him tell the girl, and saw the pearls with my own eyes. One Roumi died, but this young one came back.

"Where thousands have searched and failed and died—you know, *sidi*, the spot was hidden by centuries of shifting sand—this blundering fool succeeded. Him we will strike to-night; tomorrow, the girl. That will be easier with him out of the way. She is watched so she will not get away. She has half of the string. But it must be done quickly, *sidi*—the pearls are of fabulous value—"

The European whistled and his eyes glittered in the light of the hanging lantern.

"Go at once to the Sidi Martin and bring word that the Sidi Walters will be ready," he instructed the native. "It must be a big haul if Martin is in it."

The native departed swiftly, while the white man dressed, left the bazaar and walked hurriedly down the street.

He turned into a dimly lit native coffee house and surveyed the room. In a corner he spied the object of his quest—a broad-shouldered, flaxon-haired colossus, who was sipping black coffee with evident relish.

To this giant the older man repeated in English what the native had told him, and in a low voice added:

"A chance for a real clean-up, Walters, my boy! Martin has him in tow, which means it must be big. And Saad saw the stuff with his own eyes and bought one of the pearls for a song. It's a fortune for all of us. It means home again, Walters, home—and fixed for life!"

The giant's jaw tensed and his lips came to a thin line.

"A chance to go home," he said, low. "God! I've been waiting for it for many years, but it somehow never turns up!"

He turned to face his companion. "You're sure, Thompson?" he questioned. "He actually has the Necklace of Heaven?"

"Saad saw it, and Martin saw two of the pearls—actually has an option on them to buy them. He's posing as a pearl buyer to keep near the fellow." He laughed. "Trust Martin! He's a shrewd one!"

"I don't quite like this, though," hesitated the giant. "It's rather a dirty job—and I have 'o do all the dirty work—"

"Oh, forget it!" broke in the other. "We'll be on deck and give you a hand. He's a big fellow—that's where you come in. It's better not to have too many people around; he'd suspect something. But you alone could turn the trick—and man!—a fortune and *home* for a night's work! You have done more for less!"

The younger man drained his coffee at a gulp.

"What's my share?" he demanded.

"One-quarter," he replied, still in a whisper. "We split four ways—got to give Saad a square deal. He's a handy beggar, and it was he who dug this up. Give the Roumi the knife, if you have to, but it would be better just to bag him and ship him out to-night with Kedde's caravan—he's leaving up-country to-night."

Walters rose, his hugeness dwarfing his companion's figure. His brows were lowering and ugly.

"I'm with you!" he announced briefly. Then: "I'll go up to your place and clean up so I can meet them, and you can explain fully just how we'll work it. Where did you say they would be? The Café d'Or? All right. Come on!"

An hour later Walters, freshly shaved, in clean, neat European clothes, looking like a prosperous English tourist, shouldered his way through the crowds in the *Socco Chico* and entered the Café d'Or. His keen eyes swept the crowded room in an instant, and he spotted his quarry.

He noted that Tom was a younger man, almost as huge as himself. He was laughing at something his companion was heatedly expounding.

Walters surveyed him briefly and smiled. No mean quarry, this strapping fellow! It promised to be an interesting evening. Mar-

tin, who sat with Harcourt, had about him a nervous keenness that suggested the wariness of jackals. He noted Walters standing in the entrance, and an imperceptible signal passed between them.

Walters selected a vacant table near his friend, and as he was about to sit down started with excellently simulated surprise as Martin exclaimed:

"Well—of all things! Bob Walters!"

Walters turned, stared incredulously, then swiftly crossed to the other table, a smile making his face pleasing and attractive.

"Martin!" he gasped, shaking the other's hand. "Well, I'll be damned! Never dreamed of seeing you here! Why, it's two years since I saw you in—Alexandria!" He wrung his friend's hand. "This is a pleasant surprise!"

They had both risen, and Tom smiled sympathetically at the enthusiastic meeting between two old friends.

"This is Mr. Bob Walters, Mr. Harcourt," said Martin to Tom. "An old friend of mine. Allow me to present Mr. Harcourt, Bob. By Jove, but I'm glad to see you again, old fellow!"

Martin was evidently jubilant at the accidental meeting. Tom and Walters shook hands, and they all seated themselves at the same table.

"Tremendously pleased to run into you like this, Walters," continued Martin. "Harcourt, here, is bound on sailing to-morrow for England. I've told him what a gay old town Tangier can be—if you know the ropes—but he won't stay and see the fun. Can't you convince him to stay for a while? You know all there is to know about Tangier. Tell him what a high old time we plan here usually. I'd like to have him with us."

"Well, I know of some Kabyl girls," said Walters, smiling reminiscently. "White as the fairest English girl, but far more beautiful—if you're interested in that sort of thing. Glad to show you around."

Tom colored warmly and shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "Even white Kabyl girls can't keep me here."

Then the conversation drifted upon va-

rious topics, and with the camaraderie of men of the world they ate their dinner and drank and laughed and became very well acquainted. Later, rallied again upon his determination to return to prosaic civilization, Tom merely smiled. Martin and Walters tempted, but made no impression when they tried to induce him to visit some of the livelier water-front cafés.

"You're bound on hurrying back to civilization," complained Martin, "and you won't even spend the last evening interestingly. You're a peculiar chap!"

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but I can't stay. I've my reservations made; and besides, I have a young lady with me who is going, too, and is anxious to get home. I have to look after her." He smiled. "My fiancée," he added. "We are both homesick for the States."

"Oh—are you an American?" asked Walters. "I thought you were English. What part do you hail from?"

"That little village by the sea—New York."

"I'm an American, too," volunteered Walters slowly.

"Are you?" exclaimed Tom. "By George, I'm glad to meet you! Yes, I'm anxious to get back, but we're not going to New York; we're going to the little home town of my fiancée, in the Middle West, where I'm going to make my home hereafter."

"Some day," said Walters, "I'm going back to a little town in the Middle West, too, and perhaps we'll meet again. What town are you going to?"

"A little jerkwater town," laughed Tom. "You probably never heard of it—Penhallow, Illinois."

"Penhallow?" repeated Walters.

Tom nodded.

"I once knew a chap, I think, who came from that town," said Walters. "May I ask what your fiancée's name is?"

"Anthony," replied Tom—"Elizabeth Anthony. She's the daughter of Professor B. A. Anthony, who was with me in the desert, and—" His voice grew grave; then he continued: "He was the famous archaeologist."

"And he died in the desert?" queried

Walters with interest. "It's a queer yarn! Would you mind telling me of your experiences? They interest me."

Tom sketched his meeting with the professor, the trip after the hidden city, the attack and the death, and left out all mention of the finding of the pearls and the grave of Eadmée.

He concluded: "Perhaps you gentlemen will understand now why we're anxious to get back home, Bess and I, and you'll see why Kabyl girls don't interest me when I show you—this!" He took a leather wallet from his pocket and drew out a small photograph. "That's my fiancée," he said, handing the photograph to Martin, who took it, opened his eyes wide, and smiled.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "A perfect beauty! You know, Harcourt, on our way here from Algiers, I tried to see her face, but that heavy mourning veil foiled me. I'm sorrier than ever now that I didn't actually see her. You're to be greatly congratulated, young man!"

He turned his head to hide the crafty smile.

Walters took the photograph next and examined it intently, then with a smile he handed it back.

"As beautiful as only an American girl can be," he said quietly.

"Well, I'm sorry you won't stay in Tangier for a while," smiled Martin, "but I'm glad you took dinner with me, anyhow. I have advice that my draft will be here by morning, so we'll finish our little business."

They arose, and Martin flashed a warning glance at Walters, whose eyes were inscrutable.

"I'm going back to the hotel," said Tom as they left the café. "I don't care to leave Miss Anthony alone for long, if I can help it. The truth of the matter is that if she hadn't denied herself to me for dinner, we'd have dined together again, as usual." He laughed. "Don't take that as any reflection on your hospitality," he added. "I didn't intend it—"

Martin waved his hand in interruption, smiling.

"I couldn't blame you for your preference," he said.

Walters said nothing; he measured the young man's figure with appraising eyes.

Martin suggested driving to the hotel in an *araba*, but Tom and Walters decided that they'd rather walk. The night was perfect, the streets kaleidoscopically colorful and interesting.

"I'll be at the hotel until ten to-morrow morning," Tom told Martin. "If there should be any delay about going through with our deal, Mr. Martin, I'll have to give you back your deposit."

"Oh, everything will be all right," hastily answered Martin.

They left the *Socco Chico* and entered a winding street that was darker and narrower. The plan of action was well understood by the conspirators.

"Let's take this short cut to the road," said Martin. "I want to get out among the lights! This will put us on the new Marshan Road, and you'll be a step from your hotel."

The street became very narrow and dark. Martin and Walters kept up a running fire of conversation, and presently Martin lagged behind. The street was too narrow to walk three abreast, so Tom and Walters walked ahead.

Martin's hand crept to his pocket, and came out with a short, blunt object, while a dim, Oriental figure slid out of the deep shadows and crept up, a deadly strangler's cord in his hand.

At the same moment, as if sensing the danger, Tom turned.

Walters thrust him forward and shouted: "Run! Follow the street till you come to the Marshan Road! Run!"

Then he whirled upon his companion, and caught Martin's descending smash from a section of lead pipe on his arm.

Tom stood mute, bewildered for the moment, and saw Martin and an Oriental figure hurl themselves upon Walters, who felled the native with a terrific blow and held the other at arm's length, as helpless as if held in a vise.

"Run—you damned fool!" cried Walters again to Tom. "It's a plant—to get your pearls! Run—for the girl's sake! Quick!"

It had all occurred in a second of time,

but the mention of Bess brought action. In a flash Tom realized what it was all about, and thought of possible harm to the girl.

He ran. Up the pitch black street, turned up another, stumbled upon a musty-smelling, kneeling camel, and was loudly cursed by his owner, who seemed to be kneeling near by; on till he heard again the thrilling of *mekhanzis* and caught the reek of the water front and the flare of the lights of the road.

Walters held Martin at arm's length for several seconds, then thrust him against the wall. The native, Saad, staggered to his feet, and both of them regarded Walters, standing with legs wide apart, his two huge arms ready at his side.

"You dirty welcher!" gasped Martin hoarsely. "Do you know what you did? Are you crazy?"

Saad edged toward Martin, his eyes blazing like a cat's in the darkness.

"Dog of a traitor!" he cried. "As Allah is mighty, I swear by the law and the prophet that you shall pay for this!" The sibilant Tamazirt made the threat sound like the hiss of a snake.

Walters watched them both alertly.

"Careful with your threats," he answered from between his teeth. "You'll stay here till he's clear! If you try any funny moves—you know *me*—I'll break the both of you beyond recognition—with my hands!"

The fury of his tone, his huge bulk, cowed the two others.

Martin recovered his equilibrium quickly, however. He shook his shoulders, smoothed his coat and straightened his collar and tie. A crafty half smile crept over his keen features.

"Well," he said presently, "I don't pretend to understand your game, Walters. I was assured that I could depend upon you. You've double-crossed me, but this isn't the last trick in the game. I want to—ah—*suggest* that Tangier won't be big enough for both of us by morning."

"Anything you start," replied the giant quickly, "you want to make sure you'll finish. If you don't I'll finish it for you!"

"Very good! I'll consider that as an open declaration of war!"

"Consider it anything you like—and be damned!" flared Walters. "I'm not afraid of you—I'm no Hartani slave to be frightened by words! By morning those young people will be gone. And let me tell *you* something, Martin: I'm not low enough to turn a trick like that on a fellow countryman or woman. I've gone down pretty low, but not as far as that!"

"There's a boat leaving Gibraltar at ten to-morrow," answered Martin indirectly, his voice icy. "If you're not on it—"

A low chuckle from Walters suddenly cut him short.

"That's a promise!" Walters said. "I'll look forward to wringing your neck! I'm staying in Tangier!"

Martin shrugged.

"All right," he replied. "Come, Saad." He turned abruptly and walked away, followed by the native.

Walters stood for several seconds in his tense attitude, then his arms relaxed.

"Which means, I suppose, 'Watch your step,' he told himself. "Well, I may just as well finish the job!"

With a tread remarkably light for so big a man he glided down the dark street and made his way to the road.

VI.

TOM burst into the hotel and immediately sought Bess. The dark-eyed native maid met him instead.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked.

"Gone out, *sidi*, about half an hour ago."

"Out? With whom—where? Did she say?"

The maid didn't know.

"A letter came for her," she explained, "and she left in an *araba* with a Roumi—an elderly man." She had seen them from the window. Did the *sidi* want the letter? Here it was. The mademoiselle had forgotten it on the table when she went out.

TOM snatched the paper from the girl's fingers and read:

BESS:

Have been hurt. Mr. Thompson, who brings you this note, will bring you to me. Please come at once. I am at his home in el Maadi.

TOM HARCOURT,

A blaze of bitter blood surged into Tom's face, while a vitriolic rage began to hiss in his heart. He strove to keep control of his whirling faculties and question the maid further, but she knew nothing more. He ran down again to the clerk's desk.

"Did you see Miss Anthony go out?" he demanded, pale, his eyes glistening like a madman's. "When did she go? Who brought the letter that was sent to her room?"

The clerk endeavored to answer the feverish bombardment of questions as best he could.

"A resident brought the letter," he explained—"a Mr. Thompson. I've seen him before. I think he keeps a bazaar in the *Socco Chico*. He came in, and I sent the letter up to Miss Anthony. She came down almost immediately." She had left a package with him to be put in the hotel safe, and then he had pointed out Mr. Thompson to her. The two had talked for a few seconds, after which they had left in a waiting *araba*.

"Well," asserted Tom tensely, "she's been abducted!"

"She's been—what?" exclaimed the easy-going English clerk in astonishment.

"Abducted!" repeated Tom, his face rigid with misery. "Now, give me the address of this Thompson, and let me see the package she left with you."

"If that's the case," went on the clerk, "you'd better see your consul at once and have him get in touch with the police." He turned and gave Tom the paper package Bess had left behind.

A swift examination disclosed the fact that it contained the pearls.

Did she, then, have some suspicion regarding her trip to his supposed sick bed? Or was it just an act of precaution.

"Put these back in the safe," Tom instructed the clerk, "and here's a package of mine to put with it."

He resolved to leave his own share of the pearls behind also. There was no telling where his search for Bess might lead him, and the events of the night had taught him the value of caution. Martin and his aids, apparently, would stop at nothing to get the pearls.

Faculties racing, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder at the actions of the man Walters, who had turned upon his cronies and had given him the opportunity to escape the trap set for him. The circumstance presented a blank wall that his cogitation could not surmount. It was an inexplicable act.

He thrust it from him with impatience. There was more immediate and necessary work to think about. Bess was, undoubtedly, in their hands. What would they do to her? What might they not do when they found that she had left the pearls behind?

"See your consul," the clerk was saying. "He should be able to help you."

Tom jumped into a waiting *araba* and gave his destination to the grinning native. In twenty minutes he was sitting opposite the American consul and was telling the story.

As he neared the part of Bess's abduction he came to his feet and told the balance as he paced back and forth across the room.

"We've got to do something, and do it quick!" he fumed. "God knows what can happen to her in the meanwhile!" His clenched fists, the lines of agony around his mouth and eyes, told the consul how vividly the young man was suffering.

"We'll do everything possible," he assured Tom. "Don't lose your head! I'll get in touch with the police and we'll look up this Thompson at once."

"But before the police get into action I'm going alone," declared Tom. "I can't wait! She's—"

"Then I'll go with you," declared the consul quickly, interrupting him. "My influence may be of use if there's any trouble."

"My *araba* is waiting," flashed Tom. "Hurry—for Heaven's sake!"

During the brief ride Tom squirmed in an agony of apprehension. Countless imaginary happenings sped across his mental vision, and it was a struggle to remain seated when he wanted to jump out and run as fast as his feet could carry him to the bazaar in the *Socco Chico*.

At length, after what seemed to Tom an

interminable ride, they stood before the little curio bazaar.

The door was closed and locked.

The consul knocked sharply, then in silence they waited. There was no response. After a short interval he knocked again, more sharply.

A very light-colored and comely Sudanese negro woman, with the three parallel marks of a slave across her cheek, opened the door and looked out in fear.

"Where is your master?" demanded the consul in Tamazirt.

"Gone on a journey, *sidi*," answered the woman. "He left by camel not an hour ago."

A furious, smothered curse escaped Tom. "Let's search the place," he declared. He had a smattering of Tamazirt, and he turned to the woman. "No lies!" he exclaimed. "Or, by Allah, I'll choke it out of you! Where did he go?"

"I do not know, *sidi*," protested the woman. "This is the truth. I do not lie!"

"Who was with him?" demanded Tom. "Wasn't there a Roumi girl?"

"That I do not know, *sidi*," whimpered the slave. "The camels were in the rear, and it was dark. I saw but the Sidi Thompson and Martin, and there was the man Saad. Perhaps, under the *mahmal*—I do not know."

The woman evidently was telling the truth, as no amount of questioning could shake her simple story. Tom and the consul searched the place, but it disclosed no clew. While they searched the police arrived in response to the consul's request.

To the French officer in charge Tom repeated as much of the story as he thought necessary, the officer making rapid notes of names, places, and circumstances.

"I'll do my utmost, sir," the Frenchman promised deferentially, as he noted the presence of the American consul. "The girl will be found. I'll send search parties out everywhere. Perhaps they hide in Tangier; but if they have taken to the desert it will take some time to overtake them." To himself he added: "If ever we do!" But he could not cast any discouraging obstacles before Tom, whose acute suffering was evident.

"Can't we search now—to-night?" Tom demanded. "Can't I do something? Good God, man, I can't sit by and wait!"

"I'll do everything possible at once," promised the officer, touched by Tom's haggard misery. "Go to your hotel and try to get some rest. You'll hear from us. Searching Tangier at night would be wasted effort, but I'll have the roads in all directions watched, and I'll send out some patrols. More than that we cannot do until morning."

A blank despair clutched at Tom's heart. He was helpless to aid Bess, and the thought of her in unscrupulous hands drove fanged spears of agony through him.

"I'll detail some men to search for this Walters," the officer went on. "I can't account for the way he acted. Perhaps if he's broken with his companions, and we can pick him up, he can furnish us with a clew."

"I don't understand Thompson's actions, for that matter. We've suspected him of shady transactions for years, but could never definitely connect him with any. He must have thought it worth his while to come out so much in the open and stake everything on one throw."

"Had he obtained the necklace my fiancée had," answered Tom, "he would have been amply compensated. It's very valuable. I wish to Heaven they'd have obtained the necklace and let her alone!"

"I'm sorry, sir," sympathized the police officer. "The whole force is at your disposal. Rest assured we shall do everything."

Tom thanked him mechanically and left with the consul.

"Well," asked the consul as they rode back toward his office, "what are you going to do now?"

Tom emerged from his haze of bitter thoughts.

"God knows!" he answered wearily. "I seem to be so helpless, and she—she might—"

"Don't borrow trouble," interjected the consul kindly. "Perhaps it will all come out better than you expect. They'll find she hasn't the pearls, and they may let her go—or try to bargain for them. Then we'll

have a chance at them! Cheer up! Try to get some sleep. You can depend upon the police here—they are a very efficient lot of men."

"Yes!" agreed Tom sarcastically. "And this sort of thing goes on right under their noses!"

The consul shrugged.

"This is the Barbary Coast, remember," he offered, "and the police could use ten times as many men as they have. Shall I drop you at your hotel?"

"Yes, please," agreed Tom dully. "I don't want to seem ungrateful—I'm thankful to you, believe me; but I'm—I'm—"

"I understand," interrupted the consul. "Well, call upon me for anything in the world I can do. I'll be glad to do it. Good night."

"Good night," echoed Tom.

Once in his room, he paced the floor hopelessly—paced and thought until his mind was in chaos and his control at an end. Sleep was out of the question. He couldn't sit in the room and wait. Finally, with a muttered curse upon all things African, he slipped his automatic pistol into his pocket, and sallied forth into the streets.

He determined to search through every questionable coffee house and café with the object in view of possibly finding again the huge Walters. It looked like searching for the proverbial needle in the haystack, but any sort of physical action was preferable to him than simply sitting and waiting for the police to report.

VII.

HE walked through the bizarre, fantastically illuminated streets as in a strange dream. He scanned the polyglot passers-by with a sense of reviewing page after page from "The Arabian Nights." The strange faces, the mysterious garbs, the confusing babble of many tongues, the pungent, exotic smells, the very atmosphere, gradually filled him with a sense of impotence.

There seemed to be no chance to penetrate this Oriental surface. Mystery, intrigue, any unutterable violence seemed

possible and plausible in a fantastic atmosphere like this—and at night! Tom began to appreciate the French police officer's counsel of waiting for daylight. It seemed utterly useless to look for one man in these dives and alleys, through crooked streets, and along the water front.

In the half light of the moon-flooded city the grotesque shadows brooded with menace. As he walked swiftly from place to place, up one street and down another, he kept his hand firmly upon the little automatic in his pocket. The feel of cold steel was like the touch of a stanch friend. As the hour grew later and the street lights diminished, the Café Chantants and the coffee houses grew livelier.

Bursts of fiery Oriental music came from these places of amusement. The notes of the hautboys grew wilder and shriller; the muted drums snarled savagely.

Tom had finally gravitated toward the water front, and had visited one café after another without result. In one or two places he had been eyed insolently and speculatively, but his unusual height and bulk had been discouraging to the enterprising adventurers.

In all the world, perhaps, there is no more vicious place than the water front of Tangier—specially so at night. It is the original Barbary Coast. Port Said and Suez fade into insignificance before it; the replica—imitation, rather—in San Francisco, is, in comparison, like a girl's boarding school.

Tom sensed the racial enmity, saw the corruption, the iniquity, the Lesbian immorality; he knew he courted danger here, but he was in a black mood that ached for physical contact. Had he seen Martin in any of the cafés he would have strangled him regardless of odds.

Driven on and on by the seething whirlpool within him, he visited one place after another, and at last the fates were kind to the intrepid searcher.

He entered a dimly lit café and peered around. Grave natives of various coffee hues were watching a white Kabyl girl dancing upon a raised platform. Tom saw no sign of his quarry, and was about to leave when a huge Arab stalked past him.

He squeezed Tom's arm in passing, and walked out into the street.

Tom whirled and followed. Why, he did not quite know.

The native stopped after walking some distance, and Tom came up with him. Then the native turned, and Tom saw—

Walters!

An inarticulate cry left his lips as he stepped forward. Walters, seemingly, expected an attack, and threw his hands up as if to ward off a blow. Tom saw the motion, and took it to mean that a blow was coming. He sidestepped, and with all the strength within him drove a heavy blow full into Walters's face.

Walters went down in a heap, while Tom felt as if his hands had been crushed. He stood over Walters, a fierce elation beating in every vein.

"I've got you!" he whispered hoarsely. "You'll not get away—I've got you covered. Now, you do as I tell you, or by the gods, big as you are, I'll beat you into a jelly!"

Walters raised himself on one elbow and fingered his jaw gingerly.

"Great Cæsar!" he gasped. "Do you always pack a wallop like that?"

Tom was slightly nonplused by the man's irrelevance, but he was too angry to be sidetracked.

"Plenty more where that came from!" he answered grimly. "Now, get up and don't try to run. I've got you covered through my pocket, and so help me—I'll kill you if you make a break!"

Walters rose to his feet slowly and stood regarding Tom with a strange look. There was no apprehension, no rancor—just a questioning, puzzled regard that finally disturbed Tom.

"You forgot," said Walters calmly, "that I let you get away to-night when the others would have cooked your goose!"

"I don't forget anything!" snapped Tom. "You probably had your reasons—selfish ones, no doubt—but I'm in no mood to quibble. I've been looking for you ever since, and now I've got you. You're going to march straight in front of me direct to police headquarters!"

"And if I don't?"

"Then I'll put a couple of thirty-eights through your legs, my friend, and I'll carry you there. Perhaps the thirty-eights will loosen your tongue. Come on, now—march!"

Walters's eyes flashed. He made no move, except to shake his head slightly.

"Listen," he said, still calmly. "I've something to tell you first; then after I finish we'll go—if you want to. Here it is: To-night, when I learned that you and your fiancée were fellow Americans, I—I—couldn't go through with it. You know what happened. I broke with them, and as a matter of fact they threatened to kill me for it if I didn't leave Tangier by morning.

"Secondly, I'm tired of playing that sort of a game, and intend to go straight. You can believe it or not—let my action to-night speak for me.

"Thirdly, I'll tell you anything you want to know without going to the police. They couldn't *make* me talk if I didn't want to. Now, I like the cut of your jib, and if you are having trouble with Martin or Thompson or Saad, tell me quick, and I'll help you."

There was a quiet ring of sincerity in the giant's voice that could not be mistaken. Tom eyed him sharply, but could see no indication of treachery. Still, he was not to be taken in again so lightly. He kept the man covered and told him so.

"Oh, hell!" ejaculated Walters impatiently. "Don't be silly, youngster! Do you think I'd care about your popgun if I wasn't acting square? I've been shot before—and I'm still here. Don't waste time. Has anything happened? Did they get the pearls?"

Tom's impulse was born quite suddenly. He advanced to the giant's side. "You're—talking straight?" he asked, looking into Walters's eyes.

"Straight as a string, man! This was my first attempt at anything like—well, like this, and I couldn't go through with it. I acknowledge I've been in some pretty shady business—that's why I don't care to visit the police—but I never turned highwayman until last night—and you know what happened."

"You say you'll help me?"

"Absolutely! I'm in a bad fix myself. If I don't get them they'll get me, sure. They're probably the most desperate characters on the whole Barbary Coast."

"And you don't know what happened," continued Tom, "after I ran out of that street?"

"All I know," answered the big fellow sincerely, "is that I held them both while you got away. After that they threatened me, and I dressed up this way so they couldn't spot me so easily. And there were other reasons which I can't explain now. One of them was the police."

The man spoke with such freedom and sincerity that Tom concluded to take the chance and trust him further.

"Do you know," he went on bitterly, "that they abducted my fiancée while I was having dinner with you and Martin?"

An ejaculation of surprise and anger came from the giant's lips, and he stepped back a pace.

"The dogs!" he grated suddenly, a furious vehemence ringing in his voice. "The dirty dogs! That's Martin's little trick! I had no idea that was in the play—he didn't tell me. Well, that settles it for me! When they go making war on my countrywomen I'm on their trail! Look here, have you any money?"

"Some," answered Tom.

He was a bit taken aback by the other's fierceness.

"Enough to buy some camels?" he demanded.

Tom nodded.

"Then come on," directed Walters. "I know where they took her!"

"You do?"

"I believe so. They went out into the desert to-night. I think I know where they will go. Better tell me the whole story."

Tom told him the entire story, and as the minutes sped by became more and more convinced that he could trust the man—nay, more, that here was a powerful ally sent by a providential hand.

Walters nodded when Tom had concluded.

"I know most of that, of course," he said. "So they didn't get the pearls?"

Well, they're in a safe place. No one will try to get them out of the hotel safe. But when they find that the girl hasn't the pearls—why—damn them!" He paused and seemed to consider for several moments; then:

"Look here, Tom Harcourt," he said. "You do as I tell you, and let me help you, and we may get her away; but if you don't, I want to tell you that the police will never find her! I happen to know this crowd of cutthroats!"

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"We've got to start after them at once! It won't do to call the police in—they'd want to send a force, and that wouldn't do—it would be reported to Martin at once—oh, he has spies everywhere!"

"We've got to go alone and work up on them at night—some way—I'll work it out later."

"Well?" demanded Tom.

"It's a desperate chance. They're desperate men. I guess you know that by this time! Life don't count here on the desert the same as it does on Fifth Avenue. It's a primitive country—it's kill or be killed! Are you game for it?"

"You talk like a fool!" exclaimed Tom, impatiently. "I'll do anything, I tell you. I'd rather die a hundred times over than have Bess harmed. I'd kill the entire cutthroat population of Africa to get her back unharmed. Don't waste time. What do we do first?"

The giant chuckled suddenly.

"Good boy!" he exclaimed. "Silly of me to question you. Well, first we need two camels. You'll have to buy them—I'm broke. Two Bisharins for preference—or at least a couple of Mulaids—they're the best riding and the swiftest. We'll start at once. You get the money. I know a camel dealer who'll supply us."

Tom hesitated slightly.

"Of course you'll acknowledge that I've a right to question your motives," he said, after a moment. "Suppose you tell me why you're doing all this for me—all at once—outside of the fact that you've split with your—your—"

The giant winced noticeably.

"The fact that we're fellow country-

men," he answered simply. "I don't blame you for being suspicious of me, but—won't you try to forget what happened to-night, and take the word of a fellow American that I have no selfish motive save an honest desire to help you?"

A flood of new hope entered Tom's heart. He felt, somehow, that Walters, despite his former unsavory affiliations, was honest in his statement.

"We'll shake on it," said Tom, "to our better understanding." And he held out his hand.

Their fingers locked in a bone-crushing grip.

"I—I—owe that much to any fellow countryman or countrywoman," said the giant, huskily. "Now, come along. We've a long chase ahead!"

VIII.

BESS had suffered from a severe headache. It was the result of her weeping and heartache at the loss of her father.

It became so bad that she decided to take her meal in her own room instead of with Tom, as usual. He acquiesced with her desire and announced that since they could not have their dinner together, he would accept Martin's urgent invitation.

Then the note had come from Tom, telling her of an accident, and she had met Mr. Thompson in the lobby of the hotel and had hurried to Tom's side. It occurred to her that it would be best to leave the pearls in the hotel safe than to carry them on her person; some premonition urged her to leave them behind.

During the ride in the *araba*, Mr. Thompson had seemed to be so solicitous, so friendly, and so sorry that Tom should be incapacitated by a fall, that she could not suspect anything so brazen and melodramatic as an actual abduction.

When she arrived at the bazaar and had entered, she was given little time to think. A pungent, sweet-smelling handkerchief had been thrust under her nose, her arms held by strong hands while her consciousness gradually slipped away from her.

After that she recalled nothing. There was a vague, indeterminable period when

she was half-conscious of motion; harsh cries in which the exclamation, "Bâlek!" seemed to occur most frequently, and there were strange aromas.

When her mind returned, she opened her eyes upon darkness. She lay upon something soft and furry, from which she recoiled, and there was a hush about her that was uncanny. She cried out with fright, suddenly, and sat up, her heart drumming against her ribs.

Where was she? What had happened? Then, little by little, it all pieced itself together, and she caught her breath sharply and grew rigid with fear.

As her eyes became accustomed to the blackness about her, she made out a triangular doorway in back of her through which a star-gemmed sky shone; then she caught the unmistakable musty smell of camels.

Weak, dizzy, she stumbled to her feet and called out in a quavering voice.

Almost immediately a native, clad in the usual flowing *bermouze*, carrying a lantern, entered, turned up the wick and smiled to her. It was the man who had been with them on their journey from Algiers—Martin!

"Well, you're all right again, I see," he observed pleasantly. "Glad to see you on your feet."

"Let me out of here!" she cried. "Where am I? How dare you—"

He waved his hand in lazy interruption.

"You can go out if you wish," he said, rather to her surprise; "but you'll find yourself in the middle of the desert! That's where you are, young lady. And as for 'How dare I'—I want those pearls!"

"Then it was all a trick!" she panted. "Tom wasn't hurt—I see now—" A vivid-terror overcame her, a violent nausea as her eyes took in the pale stretch of sand through the door. She ran to the opening of the tent and looked out upon a vague star-lit world, silent, mysterious. Another tent was pitched near, and there were several vague shapes of camels resting under some drooping date palms. Heart racing, trying hard to conceal her fear, she turned again toward Martin. He smiled.

"We're two days from Tangier," he told

her, "by the fastest sort of travel. That means many miles. No ~~use~~ trying to get away—it's impossible. And there's no one to listen to you scream, except my men; no one knows of this oasis, so please act sensibly. Tell me, where did you leave those pearls?"

"Where you'll never get them!" she flared suddenly, angered. "Thank Heaven I had sense enough to leave them behind!"

"I'll get them!" smiled Martin imperturbably.

"You'll gain nothing by bringing me here," she stormed. "Don't you know that Tangier will be turned upside down? The police will—will—"

His confident smile stopped her.

"Your friend Tom will either give up all those pearls," he told her, "or I'll keep you. Fair exchange—pearls for a pearl! Candidly, I'd rather have the actual pearls—though you are an unusually nice little girl. If your friend Tom thinks as much of you as I imagine he does, he'll be glad to exchange the pearls for you. If not—"

His eyes lit up suddenly with a luster that caused the girl's flesh to creep and struck a chill to her very marrow.

"You'd have saved yourself a lot of trouble," he continued, evenly, "if you'd have had the pearls with you. As it is, it will take longer; but I'll get them—and maybe something else into the bargain!" He laughed softly, and the sound froze the girl's soul with a dread foreboding.

"The police will settle with you!" she whispered faintly.

"The police!" he mocked. "You're not in the States, remember! The police here are a farce—I know! Besides, we're where no police will ever find us. Better sit down and write a note to your friend Tom and tell him my proposition. I'll see that it's delivered, and that he's guided back here—"

"I won't!" cried Bess. "I won't!"

"You certainly will," he went on calmly, though an undercurrent of ruthlessness rang in his level voice. "There are more disagreeable things than parting with your pearls, young lady! I'm sure your friend Tom will think so—and so will you, after a moment's thought. I might be inclined

to turn you over to our native friend, Saad—after I'm through with you. He's expressed a very fervid desire for your company—"

The girl cried out suddenly, and he stopped.

Outside, in the hush of the midnight desert, she heard the cough of a camel; something screamed far off in the eerie wastes, and she shuddered. She could do nothing, she realized. Her puny strength was of no use.

"Well," asked Martin, "will you write the note?"

She nodded, dazedly, her eyes dilated, her breast heaving. No price was too high to ward off the unthinkable, unutterable violence Martin spoke of so glibly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I'll get you pen and paper. And I'm bringing you some clothes—native clothes—I want you to put them on. Please raise no objections. I want you to look like a native girl in case—by any rare chance—some one should happen to stumble upon this oasis."

He turned and left abruptly, while Bess crept to the door in an agony of heart-break. No prospect of help loomed here—just the blue-white stretches of moon-drenched sands. The two tents looked pitifully small and forlorn in the great wastes. Far to the south she thought she caught the loom of a mountain range, inky black against the midnight sky.

Vainly she cast about for some avenue of escape, some method to outwit Martin; but her isolation, her lack of any weapon, forced the conclusion upon her that she was helpless.

Naturally brave, she quickly began to recover her self-possession, and paced the tent like a little caged, velvet leopard, ready to sheath its claws in its enemies at the first opportunity. The same blood that had run in her father's veins ran also in hers.

She resolved, all at once, to comply with Martin's demands. It would serve no purpose to oppose him now. She would do as he told her, and wait for morning. Perhaps an opportunity would come.

She was quite calm when Martin returned, and he eyed her in silent approval.

She wrote the note to Tom, at Martin's dictation, in which there were several suggestive phrases calculated to wring the heart of her fiancé when he read it; and then she accepted the Keshan silk garments Martin offered her.

"I'll get this note off at once," he asserted. "When you get up in the morning, change into these native clothes. You can feel free to go out of your tent if you like—no one will molest you—until we hear from Harcourt," he finished, significantly. "But don't go far, you'll get lost. There's some water in that canteen. Those hides will serve as your bed and I'll send you some *cous-cousou* in the morning."

She made no verbal answer, simply inclining her head, and he walked away.

From the door she saw him hand the note to a silent man, and almost immediately after a camel arose and lumbered away, bearing the native.

Martin was losing no time in dispatching the note to Tom.

She let the flap fall over the door, and lay down again upon the skins. She was very tired, but sleep was impossible. She was afraid to close her eyes.

The oil lamp cast flickering, Rembrandtesque shadows through the tent, and her faculties were lured constantly to the borderlands of sleep—then she would start up suddenly, striving to keep awake.

Hour after hour she lay thus, until the oil in the lamp gave out. Startled out of her semiconsciousness by the sudden darkness, she rubbed her eyes and went to the door.

In the east a faint, pink flush was dawning. The air was cold and penetrating. She shivered and returned to her bed of skins.

Another day! She must watch carefully. Her own clothes were soiled and wrinkled. She slipped into the silks Martin had left, drank a little water, and weary, heavy-lidded, she waited, wondering what the day would bring her.

IX.

THE same dawn looked down upon two huge camels that lurched southward.

Upon the leading camel sat Walters, in *bermousse* and turban, burned to the color of leather by his many years under the African sun. He would have passed as a native anywhere, if one did not see the northern curly hair that no African sun could darken.

Tom rode behind, similarly attired. He slumped forward in his seat, for he was infinitely weary, and the camel's motion for the past two days and nights had fatigued him, unused to it as he was.

"Getting light," called Walters, over his shoulder, as he slid from his camel. "Better slow up and take a bite. We're pretty near the oasis I mean now, and we'd better go cautiously."

Tom rode up, and at a word from Walters, and a tap upon their knees, the obedient beasts knelt.

"Poor devils!" exclaimed Walters, as he watered and fed them. "They're fagged out! We've pushed them pretty hard."

Tom did not answer, but stood looking around at the desolation of the scene. As far as the eye could reach lay the tortured sand dunes, broken here and there by an occasional very scanty growth of tamarisk or a dwarfed date palm. He shivered in the bitter cold of the Saharan dawn. Soon it would be blistering hot again. He hated the country. Its blank sterility tortured his eyes, and a painful sense of impotence grew in his heart.

They had not met a soul once they had struck the desert, and Walters explained it thus:

"This is a trail no one uses, for it leads nowhere—just to the oasis. The regular trading caravans only ply between trading points, and there's nothing south of us except the Sahara, the Atlas Mountains, and the balance of Africa."

Now, as he looked about him, he was reminded of another spot in the tawny wastes, where Professor Anthony lay in his shallow grave by the side of Eadmeé, the Rose from the Garden of Allah. And now Bess was lost somewhere out upon the same sinister expanse.

They both ate rapidly, for they were hungry; and then they sat for a few minutes smoking. Both were sore and weary,

as neither had slept more than a few hours since leaving Tangier.

"We'll have to go slowly now," said Walters. "We may make a turn around any of these sand hills and come flush upon the oasis. If they're there, it wouldn't do—can't tell how many of them there might be. We'd have to fight for it immediately, and the girl might get hurt. We'll go slow to-day and watch carefully."

Tom nodded, and for perhaps the twentieth time surveyed his companion with curiosity. There was now no doubt in his mind of Walters' honesty of purpose in espousing his cause. Walters' eagerness to rescue Bess and punish her abductors seemed nearly equal to Tom's own. And Tom was grateful, for he now realized that without Walters' help, he would have had little opportunity to help the girl.

"If," he added mentally, as his eyes strayed across the endless sands, "I ever get an opportunity." It all seemed so hopeless, so futile. The desert expanse seemed so limitless.

A sharp exclamation from Walters startled him out of his reverie.

"Look!" whispered Walters, pointing toward the south. "A camel! I'll bet it's some one we're looking for! Don't move—we're fairly well hidden here—and hand me that rifle!"

Tom looked and silently passed the rifle to Walters. He saw a dromedary coming toward them, winding in and out between the larger dunes.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Wait!" answered Walters, tersely. "When he sees us he'll either come up or run. If he runs it's a sign that he's not quite honest, and I'm going to pot the camel and investigate."

They lay in a tense silence watching the approaching beast. Suddenly he stopped, and the native upon his back leaned forward. Then he wheeled the camel and began to flog him.

"We want him!" cried Walters, coming to his feet and bringing his rifle to bear. He sighted carefully and fired.

The native swayed in his seat; then he fell upon the sands. The camel ran undecidedly a few paces and stopped.

"Come on!" cried Walters, starting forward. "I must have shot high—I meant to get the camel."

Together, as fast as they could go in the soft, clinging sand, they raced toward the fallen man. As they neared him the native raised himself and tugged at a heavy pistol hung at his waist.

"Stop that, Saad!" cried Walters fiercely, in Tamazirt, as he recognized the native. "Stop that—or I'll finish you!"

The threat had its desired effect. The native watched them approach, his beady eyes malevolent and glittering like two highly polished shoe buttons. Tom noted that on his left shoulder the white *berousse* was stained with blood.

"Leave him to me!" exclaimed Walters to Tom, in English, after he had disarmed the native. "I know best how to deal with his kind."

He turned to Saad, who still sat in silence, eying them both with the venomous regard of a cobra.

"Saad," began Walters, reverting to the harsh Tamazirt, "you know me. You can't expect any mercy. You won't get it." His voice was low, and the dangerous ring in it impressed even Tom.

"Now tell me where the others are, and where the girl is—and tell the truth—or you'll fill the bellies of jackals to-night! What are you doing here? Now talk—and quick!"

For several heartbeats the native regarded both of them in silence, his eyes shifting swiftly from one to the other; then, without comment, he handed Walters the note that Martin had entrusted to him. It was addressed to Tom.

Walters handed it to Tom, who read it in ominous silence. The blood drained from his heart as he read the heartless alternative Martin proposed if the pearls were not immediately forthcoming in exchange for Bess. A furious curse died in his throat and a dusky pallor showed under the tan of his skin.

He handed the note to Walters, who read it in turn, and when he had completed it, looked at Saad with such a cold, terrible hatred that the native dropped his defiant eyes.

"That settles it!" declared Walters. "They're at the oasis, all right!" His eyes strayed to the dromedary Saad had been riding. "This is what we'll do," he resumed swiftly, turning to Tom.

They withdrew from the native a few feet, and Walters planned their course of action in swift, sure sentences.

Tom remonstrated once or twice, but the giant patiently argued him away from his objections. Finally they agreed.

X.

THAT same evening, immediately after the sun's sudden descent, and while the oasis was still bathed in the lurid afterglow, Martin recognized Saad's dromedary approaching the oasis from the north.

A curse left his lips as the consciousness that something had gone wrong with his plans pervaded him. Saad was not expected to return for several days. This meant that something untoward had occurred. As the camel came nearer, the hunched figure swaying and leaning forward, Martin saw that the *berousse* was blood stained.

A premonition of impending danger filled him. He drew his pistol and raced forward to meet the approaching camel.

"Saad!" he called. "What happened? What—"

And suddenly an astonishing thing happened: the figure upon the camel straightened up, leaped to the sands and launched itself full upon the startled Martin.

But although he was taken unexpectedly, he recognized the huge bulk of Walters. He brought his automatic up and fired blindly. The next instant Walters' huge fist had landed full in his face, lifting him off his feet and dropping him in an inert, senseless heap upon the sand.

Pausing only to pick up the automatic, Walters ran toward the tents.

The sound of the shot had brought out Thompson. He realized the menace in the big, flapping figure that was approaching, and opened fire, Walters replying in kind.

For several seconds the pistol duel raged; then a lucky shot by Thompson hit Walters and he dropped. He threshed about,

shouting and growling, trying to regain his feet and seemingly unable to do so.

Thompson's triumphant shout died in his throat, however, when a sudden shot in his rear caused him to whirl with reptilian swiftness. He saw another native-clad figure running toward him and firing with threatening accuracy. Bewildered, believing the camp surrounded, he ran to one of the camels, cut the beast loose, and flogged him into a lumbering gallop.

The darkness fell swiftly, and he disappeared within its enveloping mantle, seemingly unhurt.

Tom raced to the tents, his automatic thrust forward. A cold determination lay in his heart, a deliberate conclusion: if Bess were harmed, he would kill whoever else he found in camp who had had any hand in her abduction.

The first tent was empty. He ran to the second. Here, as he tore away the flap and plunged within, he saw Bess, dressed like a native girl, standing in the center under the light of the hanging lantern.

Pale, round-eyed, her hands clasped to her heart, she, in turn, stared at the wild native figure that had burst in upon her. A little lyric note of fright escaped her as she stepped back a pace. Then, as Tom came under the direct light, the girl swayed suddenly toward him with a tremulous cry that plucked at his heart strings and contracted his throat.

For a moment he held her in a crushing embrace; then he turned toward the door again, fearing an attack from the rear.

Cautiously leading her out, he saw that the abductors had fled. Evidently there had been only Martin, Thompson, and Saad.

But where was Walters?

Holding Bess by the hand, they both ran toward the spot where Tom had seen the pistol duel, and they came upon Martin. He was still unconscious, and his face was horribly distorted. He looked as if his jaws were broken. The girl turned away with a shudder.

A little farther on they came upon Walters, unconscious, the blood flowing from a wound in his head.

In France Tom had been taught the

trick of carrying a wounded man. He shouldered the giant, though he sagged under Walters' great weight, and marched toward the tent where he had found Bess.

"They're gone," he called to the girl, who walked by his side and tried in some measure to help support the unconscious Walters. "Let's get him back in the tent. I'm afraid he's badly hurt. There's a light there. Thompson won't come back—and Martin's out of the running."

"Who is this?" she asked.

"A real friend," answered Tom. "Without his help I'd never have found you."

Together they laid the big fellow upon the pile of skins, and Tom took the lantern down in order to make a closer examination.

He found it to be a deep scalp wound that had robbed Walters of consciousness.

"Any water, Bess?" he asked, turning to her.

For answer she thrust the canteen into his hands.

He bathed the wound and tore several strips from his *bermousse* to make bandages. Finally the man opened his eyes, sighed deeply, and looked around. His eyes fell upon Tom, and then lingered upon the girl.

Tom breathed a sigh of intense relief. He had come to like Walters suddenly with a great affection.

"Why didn't you shoot first?" he demanded severely, to hide his own agitation.

"Didn't know how many there might be here—couldn't trust Saad altogether. So I thought I'd use my hands on Martin and then sneak into camp and surprise them. But he shot, and that brought Thompson. Anyway—" He paused and stared at the girl. "Bess!" he said, and his voice was so peculiar that Tom and the girl exchanged puzzled glances.

"Fever!" muttered Tom.

Walters heard. A queer smile came to the corners of his lips.

"No, Tom," he said. "It's not fever." With some difficulty he reached into his *bermousse*, fumbled around, and finally brought out an old-time photograph. It showed two little boys with arms around each other. One was a small boy, with

glasses; the other was a rangy youngster, and inscribed at the bottom was:

Benjamin and Arthur Anthony.

From Mother.

Bess cried out when she saw it, the blood rushing to her face, wave upon wave.

"Why, I have one like that at home! I've seen this before! That's d-daddy and uncle Arthur who ran away from home!" She stopped, her eyes seeking Walters. "How did you get this—where—?" Then a clairvoyant thrill stopped her. "You—you—"

The giant slowly nodded his head.

"I'm—I'm—Arthur Anthony," he whispered, and turned his eyes from Tom, while the dusky red of a great shame stained his face. "I'm the one who ran away. God knows—I've not been very good—but perhaps I've repaid in part.

"I recognized the names that night in the café, and gave Tom a chance to get away. I was ashamed to claim any relationship. I wanted to get home and work my way back to respectability first—"

"But—but—I don't understand!" cried Bess, looking from Walters to Tom in utter bewilderment.

"Tom will explain to you," continued the giant, weakly. "Tell her—everything,

(The end.)

Tom! Don't spare me. We'll be leaving here in the morning, and perhaps—Bess—you'll forgive—"

The girl sobbed suddenly.

"Why, Uncle Arthur!" she managed to say. "You're all—all—I have left, now—" She bent forward and kissed Walters—or, more properly, Anthony.

A pained fire crept into the giant's cheeks and he closed his eyes for a moment.

"Thank you—for that!" he whispered, huskily. "Now you two go out and tie up the camels. We'll need them to return to Tangier in the morning. And, my dear, Tom will tell you—what you want to know."

Tom had been a bewildered and naturally interested spectator. Now he squeezed the hand of the injured man and walked out upon the desert with Bess.

Long into the night they talked in low tones, while he told her of all that had occurred, of his meeting with Walters, of how much they owed him. And he lied like a gentleman in places.

While inside the tent, a world-weary adventurer, surfeited with roaming and the lure of far places, heard them; and a glad content came to him as he pictured a return to the little, clean, mid-western town he had longed for so eagerly, where he would spend the balance of his days.

TO MY WIFE--A CURIO HUNTER

FROM very, very tender years
 You loved things old and hoary;
 You used to gather antique bits,
 Each with a doubtful story.
 Your coins, your very rusty dirks
 Displayed with jubilation,
 Your ancient helms, and dented shields
 Built up your reputation,
 So, when I muse upon your craze
 With morbid introspection,
 I wonder—did you marry me
 To crown your life's collection?

La Touche Hancock.



The Gusher

Part II
by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "Treasures of Tantalus," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

MERTON DIBBLE returns home from service overseas to the farm his father left him. The title of the farm is not clear, for Merton's hated stepmother, a grasping woman who caused his beloved father's death, is also a claimant. But she has disappeared, and one of Mert's first tasks is to locate her. This he finally does through a lawyer, and at the same time discovers that some crooked oil men, with whom his stepmother seems to be associated, are invading Goar Valley. Because his father had been robbed by oil men Mert decides to oppose the promoters, by force if need be, and organizes a gang of ex-soldiers to help him. His life is made miserable by the persistent attentions of a girl named Violet Worthington, who, with her invalid father, is boarding at the next farm. Mert is a woman-hater, judging all women by his stepmother, and he will have nothing to do with Violet. After one destructive raid on the oil-well machinery, Mert plans another. In the midst of it a girl screams, throws her arms about his neck and holds tight. He tries to shake her off, and as he drags her into the light she pulls the mask from his face, and recognizes Mert. As he sees that it is Violet, a State constable leaps on his back.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAR WITNESS.

AS the constable leaped on Mert's back and flung his arms about his neck the girl scrambled to her feet and stood for a moment staring into the face of the man she had helped capture. Then with a little shudder she turned and fled into the house, slamming the door after her. The struggling men were left in darkness. For a moment the young Night Rider was in despair. He had been clearly identified by the girl. He was in the strangle-hold of his adversary. It was a hopeless case. He could only make it worse by resisting arrest.

But as he felt the bony wrist of the constable cutting off his wind the old fighting

blood suddenly boiled, the spirit that carried him through many a tight place in France when his life had for the moment seemed a thing cheap and easily discarded. An uncontrollable madness seized him.

He reached up and locked his fingers together at the back of the constable's neck. Bending over he drew down, relentlessly, while the clutch of the other sawed tighter and tighter into his throat. His breath was cut off. He was racked with the acute torment of strangulation. But at the same time the muscular neck of the other man was beginning to bend to his clutch. He must break that neck or throw its owner over his head before his strength left him.

For a moment that seemed an hour they swayed back and forth in silence excepting for the constable's heavy breathing and

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Mert's choking gasps. The officer's companions were rushing to his assistance and were almost upon them.

Then Mert felt the clutch on his throat weaken a little. It was now or never. Summoning all his remaining energy he heaved forward suddenly. His adversary's feet left the ground. His clutch on Mert's neck broke and the officer described a wide arc over Mert's head, breaking free and falling heavily on his back.

Mert stood for a moment while he regained his breath. Then he lunged for his adversary again in the pitch blackness. But the other had already regained his feet. They clinched now face to face with no advantage to either. A moment each struggled for a lead, then tripped in the long grass and fell.

They were now on a short sharp slope leading away from the house and ending in a rickety lath fence at the top of the steep bank of a ravine. Just as the first two of the constable's fellows arrived, almost stepping on them in the darkness, they hit this fence, broke through it and dropped some fifteen feet to the bed of the swift little brook at the ravine's bottom.

Mert was on top when they struck. He heard his antagonist groan and felt him go limp under him. The fugitive staggered to his feet and stood up in the edge of the stream, listening to the shouts of his pursuers on the bank above. At that moment he remembered the dynamite bomb that was still in his pocket. By one of those freaks of high explosives the vicious stuff had survived the rough and tumble, but Mert, at the thought of what might have been, was suddenly weak with fright.

But he heard a call for a lantern. Some one was already tentatively feeling his way down the bank. There was no time for thinking of past dangers.

The shock of his fall had shaken him out of his rage and restored his power to think. He gave attention to the injured constable just long enough to make out his groans above the babble of the brook. He felt him stir feebly. A moment before he would have killed the man joyfully. Now he was deeply relieved to find him alive.

He beat a rapid retreat down the stream

just as a man with a lantern appeared at the top of the bank. The stream was shallow and he walked in its bed to hide his trail. The babble of the swift water over the pebbles drowned the sound of his going.

It was a scant ten rods from where he started to the point where the brook debouched into the Senabaugua River. He reached it before his pursuers had recovered from their confusion.

Mert had planned his getaway well. He had gone to Senabaugua that afternoon and had supper at the home of one of his gang who lived with an elderly father and mother given to retiring early. After supper several other members of the gang drifted in for a poker game. When the old people had retired, all but two of the party slipped out the back door and presently were on their way to Goar Valley. The two who remained artfully kept up a noise like a full-sized party throughout the evening. All but Mert rode their horses to the rendezvous. He took no chance on having his horse betray him.

Instead he borrowed a canoe belonging to one of the gang and paddled to a point near the mouth of the little brook from which he was just fleeing. Here, when he came out on the river shore leaving his pursuers behind him, he found the canoe and paddled swiftly but silently away in the darkness. A little out he paused and dropped the bomb overboard into deep water. An hour later he rejoined the poker party to which meantime the rest of the gang had returned.

Mert told his story amid the general consternation of the party.

He had just finished when there came a sharp rap at the door. Their host opened it and was confronted by a State constable.

"Is Mert Dibble here?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Right here," Mert replied, feigning surprise when he saw the officer. "What do you want? Anything happened in the valley?" he asked.

"No. Nothing serious, but no thanks to you. You tried hard enough. We got you with the goods, so don't try any stalling. And don't any of you pull any rough stuff, because we got the house surrounded."

And to the stuffy little village jail they went, despite all protests. When they were herded into the little court-room in the morning for a hearing before the local justice of the peace their spirits fell. A brief sizing up of the group before them made it evident that the odds were heavily against them. While the justice of the peace, Lewis Cramer, was a kindly old soul inclined to give the benefit of the doubt to the sons of his neighbors, he was over-awed by the presence of District Attorney Pomeroy whose home was in the county seat and who had no local prejudices. On the other hand his failure to indict anybody in connection with the other raid had made him determined to let nothing slip this time.

Violet Worthington was there, as they had of course expected. She sat with down-cast eyes, looking pale and agitated. The constable with whom Mert had fought was present, too, bruised and bandaged, but seriously injured only as to his feelings.

Ranged against the wall in the back of the room was a motley assemblage whose presence in a court of justice could mean only one thing—that they were there under compulsion, for the Hookfingers of the Senabaugua hills were no friends of the law, nor would their not unnatural aversion for it allow them to foregather out of mere curiosity where law was being dispensed.

In the forefront was Sam Goar, leader of the tribe, rangy and stooping of figure, his sallow narrow face and hard brown eyes under black overhanging brows expressive of low cunning. A cast of the right eye added to the viciousness of his countenance. Sam Goar by some freak of nature was the only one of the Hookfinger tribe gifted with any mental acuteness. He had a common school education, and dressed in marked contrast to his followers in neat, clean and whole garments, in keeping with his illicit prosperity. Likewise the common mutilation of the tribe had passed him over lightly. His disfigurement was confined to a missing thumb on his right hand. He had a habit of gesturing when he talked so that digital lack was in glaring evidence. He seemed rather proud of it than otherwise.

Back of this sinister leader were a dozen

or so of his slack-jawed, lack-wit fellow-tribesmen, built on the same general plan as Sam, but lacking his keenness, and arrayed for the most part in tattered blue jean.

One or both hands of each of these men bore the tribal index, bent and twisted fingers that had the effect of being the mutilated claws of unclean animals.

The State constable in charge of the guards at the Flanders farm testified that he and his guards had driven off the Night Riders after a sharp skirmish. The men had fled toward the hills on horseback. He and a half a dozen other guards had gone in pursuit, but were not sure which way they turned until they came to Sam Goar's shanty. He hailed them as they passed and told them that a party of horsemen had ridden by his place in the direction of Senabaugua about fifteen minutes before.

The constable stopped a moment at Goar's place and telephoned back to the Flanders farm to see if there were any clews and learned about the fight between the constable and an unknown member of the Night Rider band whom this constable thought was Mert Dibble. Inquiry at the Dibble house showed Dibble was not in and Martha had told them he had gone to the village for a poker game at the Tanner home. Miss Worthington, who had torn the Night Rider's mask off, was in hysterics as the result of her experience and would make no statement.

So the constable rode on into Senabaugua and arrested the group at the Tanner home. He said further he had recognized Mert Dibble's voice shouting to his men.

Sam Goar corroborated this testimony. Each one of his followers in turn who lived along the route likewise testified to hearing horsemen pass.

Everything was pointing to one conclusion when there was a stir at the door and Firewater Joe poked his head into the room.

What other witnesses have ye got?" asked the justice at this moment.

"I seeum fellers ride by too down on reservation," Joe shouted. "They go like hell toward lake. I think mebbe they go down Sagwah town, no good Indians mebbe so.

I hear 'nother white man want make well in Goar Valley, hire Indians smashum Mis' Flanders's well."

This was a pure improvisation on Joe's part, but it created a sensation. The district attorney usurped the justice's function by cross-examining this volunteer witness. Joe stuck to his story, but retreated into his native taciturnity when asked to amplify it.

The injured constable, called next, said he knew Dibble well by sight, and in the momentary view of his back he got before the light was shut off his antagonist appeared to be a man of Dibble's build and bearing. He admitted he had not seen his face.

Then Miss Worthington was called to the stand. When she came to the tearing off of the man's mask she faltered and stopped.

"Who was the man?" encouraged the justice.

She stole a glance at Mert Dibble, who was eying her stonily, braced for the inevitable.

"No one I ever saw before," she half whispered.

District Attorney Pomeroy glared at the girl.

"Describe him," he commanded.

Violet stole another look at Mert Dibble, a longer one this time. It seemed to Mert she was fixing the details of his features more firmly in mind. She included his tall slender strength, rather long fair face and light brown hair and then said:

"He was short and stocky, round-faced and swarthy. His hair was black. I thought he was an Indian."

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLET WORTHINGTON'S DILEMMA.

VIOLET WORTHINGTON left the court-room, pale and trembling. As she pressed through the crowd at the door a quiet stranger, standing in the rear of the crowd, without giving her more than a curious glance, slipped into her hand a folded piece of paper, unobserved by those around him. It was the same myster-

ious stranger who had trailed Mert Dibble to his train on his return to Goar Valley.

Back in her room at the farm she read the stranger's note, which ran:

Must see you down by the river to-night as soon as you can get away safely.

She was still thinking of this command when she joined her father, who had been thrown into one of his bad spells by the uproar of the night before and had as yet been told nothing of the facts about it. She found the invalid better and sitting up in bed again.

"What was all the tumult outside last night?" he asked. "It woke me up so suddenly that it seemed to knock me out."

"Some hoodlums had a quarrel with the well drillers and threatened to wreck the machinery. The guards fired at them and drove them off. There was no damage done.

"Daddy," she asked after a little silent thought, "would you like to hear a queer story I read in a magazine I picked up while I was waiting for Mrs. Flanders? I'd like your opinion about the way the heroine acted."

"Why, yes, dear. Your old dad's ideas about literature aren't worth much, though."

"Well, this comes pretty close to life, and your ideas about that are worth a lot. The hero of the story seemed to hate the heroine and he seemed so brutal about it that she hated him, too. Then one night she caught him running away from the police. He'd been suspiciously near a bank that had been robbed and the police got after him, but it was dark and they couldn't identify him. The girl got in his way when he was running and stopped him. She clung to him so hard that he couldn't throw her off without hurting her. Instead of doing that he ran a risk of being caught and sent to State's prison rather than be rough to her. He was caught afterward largely because of the delay she caused, but they couldn't hold him without the girl's identification, and when she came into court she couldn't bring herself to betray the man who could have been brutal so easily, and yet had rather go to State's prison than do

so. So she perjured herself and said the fugitive was a man she had never seen before."

"Well, from the strictly legal standpoint she did wrong, of course. But from the human standpoint I can't help admiring her impulse and her courage in acting on it."

Violet looked greatly relieved.

"But look what she did afterward," she went on. "She needed some money awfully badly to help her sick mother, more than she could earn. Some people wanted to buy a business block the young man owned, but he hated them so and believed they were crooks who would cheat him, he wouldn't sell although he would have got a good bargain out of it. So they hired her to trick him into selling his property, and she did it and got the money she needed. What do you think of her, dad?"

"Well, I'd say she showed fine generous impulses in the first case, but didn't live up to them in the second case. Still she may have needed the money so badly that she's excusable. But if her family were any good they'd rather starve to death than have her mix up in anything like that."

"Dad," she said finally after the talk had drifted to other matters for a little, "I've been thinking, you're so comfortable here couldn't you let me go back to town to work again? I'd be with you over the week end. We're going to need money before long."

The old man's brow clouded.

"Poor little daughter," he sighed. "You'd be better off without your useless old father. Do whatever you think you must. I'll get along all right."

The Flanders family retired about ten that evening, and a little later Violet slipped out silently and went down the yard and crossed the road to the wharf. She made out the dim figure of a man sitting on its edge.

"Sit down. I want to talk to you," he commanded.

She obeyed a little hesitantly, keeping well away from him as she did so.

"Well," he sneered. "You did a nice piece of work this morning, you and that cursed Indian."

"What do you mean?" she asked coldly.

"I mean we had the gang that's bedeviling us sewed right up in a sack. We had their leader, this young Dibble, right where we wanted him. If we'd got him indicted we could have put the screws on him and made him sell his place. And then you spilled the beans. When the Indian made it look as though the gang might have belonged on the reservation and you swore it wasn't young Dibble that you caught, the district attorney had to throw up his hands."

"That old hick justice wouldn't hold the gang for a minute when it was only the word of a bunch of Hookfingers against them; and the district attorney admitted he hadn't any evidence to warrant it. They let the pack go, and now the district attorney is on a wild goose chase for a bunch of Indian Night Riders. What are you trying to do? Double cross us? Now we've got to have a show down. How about it?"

"Why are you so bent on getting the Dibble farm?" she countered. "Why not be content with the other farms you can buy? They may be as good."

"Not likely. All the geological sharks and rod fakers agree that the Dibble tract lies right over the center of the oil pocket. This well we're drilling may hit it and may not, but over on the other place it looks like a pretty sure thing. It's a gamble, of course, but the odds are the best on the Dibble place. First thing we know young Dibble will wake up and sell to somebody else if you don't act quick."

"But if you buy him out will you treat him fairly? I won't go on with this unless I'm sure there won't be any trickery."

"We've given you all the assurance you need of our honesty. The question is now, why did you lie down on the job this morning?"

Violet swallowed hard. She was glad the darkness hid her face.

"Do you mean to imply I perjured myself in court?" she demanded, putting all the indignation she could assume into her voice. "I didn't identify Mr. Dibble because he wasn't there to identify. That's all."

"There! There! Don't go up in the air. I'll have to take your word for it. The

question is, are you still with us? I've got a scheme laid out for you if you are. Remember, there's a thousand bucks in it for you anyhow, if you land him, and ten thousand if the well goes big."

Violet was silent for a minute.

"I'm not sure whether I want to go on with it. Let me think it over till to-morrow night, and meet me here again."

She returned to the house in a very unsettled frame of mind. All the next day she debated the problem. And all the time she could not help wondering, and hating herself for wondering, what attitude Mert Dibble would take toward her since she had saved him from a term in prison. If he came over as she would expect any gentleman to do and make some acknowledgment would she be able to go on with the plot against him?

Of course she could not know that Mert, back at work on his farm, was carrying on the same debate with himself. He knew what he owed to the girl. He couldn't in the least understand her action in defending him as she had. He realized, though, that he should have the grace to go over and thank her, but he didn't know how to do it. He didn't want to let himself stop hating her. At moments he hated her the more for putting him under obligations to her.

Evening came with the debate still undecided.

Meantime Violet waited for him till it became evident he was not coming, and then settled down with a fixed purpose until the family retired. As before she stole down to the wharf. The oil agent was there.

"I'm ready to do what you want me to do," she said simply.

CHAPTER IX.

SAM GOAR PLAYS IT BOTH WAYS.

SAM GOAR'S place on the Mountain Road was a story and a half inn-like structure, clap-boarded and newly painted. There was a well-tilled garden-patch at the rear of the house, and beyond it several log outbuildings, in the blind

cellar of one of which, well-founded rumor had it, Sam ran his illicit still.

The house's innlike appearance did not altogether belie its character, for Sam usually had several more or less dubious looking boarders during the summer who came out there for the hunting. Sam's other ostensibly respectable occupations were securing woodsmen for the lumber companies and trading horses, a considerable bunch of which were always grazing in open weather in the stump-lot beyond the outbuildings.

Early one evening, a few days after the abortive Night Rider raid on the Flanders oil well, the dapper young Mr. Haslip of the Flowerville Oil Development Company stepped out of a Senabaugua livery rig in front of Sam Goar's place. Goar unlimbered his lank form slowly and slouched through the front door. A moment later he admitted his caller into a bare little room with drawn shades, lighted by a dim oil lamp.

"Well, Sam," Haslip began, "are you sold out to the Dunsmore crowd or do we still get a look in?"

Goar ran his thumbless hand through his thatch of iron gray air and assumed a poker face.

"That depends on how much you fellers want to put up fer a peek," he allowed cautiously. "I ain't denyin' there's some competition fer peekholes these days an' that the price has riz."

"Well," Haslip admitted, "I see the point, you old scalawag. I think we can afford to monopolize the peekholes. I judged Dunsmore had slipped you something when you went down to court the other day and swore you heard Dibble's voice among the Night Riders that went by your place the night before. Sort of spoke out of turn, didn't you? Got your evidence thrown out. Wonder they didn't arrest you for perjury."

"I said I thought I heard his voice," Goar corrected him. "That ain't perjury thet they kin prove. Mebbe I did think so. Ol' Judge Cramer ain't no mind reader."

"Well, that's no matter. Let's get down to cases. How much is the Dunsmore crowd paying you, and what are you supposed to do for it?"

"They ain't payin' me to run an' tell you all about 'em," demurred Goar cautiously.

"Listen," whispered Haslip, tapping his host's lean knee. "Whatever they're paying you we'll double, but provided only that you produce the goods. How about it?"

"Might be arranged," Goar conceded.

"First thing then, has Dunsmore got options on any other land or oil rights excepting the Flanders place?"

"Nope. He ain't workin' it that way. He thinks he's got 'em buffaloe'd by tellin' 'em to lie low an' see how this well works out. If she's a gusher he'll hook 'em all into his company an' skin 'em. If she ain't he'll make her seem like one long enough to hook 'em jest the same. He aims to keep progress at the well secret till he knows jest how she's comin', then hop in an' clean up quick. Only land he has real faith in's the Dibble place. How he's figgerin' to git that I don't know. He ain't let me in on that. Young Dibble's got the idea, somehow, all you fellers is crooks an' he won't deal with ye."

"Yes, the Dibble place is the one best bet. We've been after that for years and may get it yet. One thing I want you to do is to dope out some new scheme of swinging Dibble. Another thing is to get a spy in next to the Flanders well, and not only tip me off the minute they strike anything, but keep any message from getting in to Dunsmore in Flowerville as long as possible. Now another thing. Suppose you go to each farmer who's itching to get rich quick, and tell him in strict confidence that his particular farm is the one Dunsmore has spotted as the most likely to produce oil. Tell him he has commissioned you to take an option on it secretly that will give him the inside drag later on. Then get the option in your own name, explaining that there must be no evidence of Dunsmore's connection with it. Then you can transfer the option to me and leave friend Dunsmore out in the cold, holding an empty bag. See?"

Sam Goar saw, with the aid of a liberal advance payment.

When Haslip departed as inconspicuous-

ly as he came, neither he nor Sam Goar noted the patient presence of Firewater Joe behind a tree near the one to which the city man had tethered his horse, nor knew that a keen Indian ear had been plastered to the keyhole of the side door leading into Goar's sanctum during the entire conference.

Both would have been considerably disturbed had they listened an hour later to a pretty complete report of their conference delivered to Mert by his faithful spy.

Toward noon the next day Firewater Joe strolled up the steep winding road leading to Sam Goar's place. The Hookfinger chief as usual was resting on his veranda, tilted back against the wall in his favorite splint bottomed chair and sucking at his inevitable corncob pipe.

"Mebbe so you likum little hoeing in garden," Joe said.

"Sure, Joe. Go to it. Hoe's leanin' 'gainst the fence as usual."

Joe went around the house, found the implement, and selecting a row of corn after some consideration, began hoeing in a rather sketchy and unenthusiastic fashion. Presently he dropped on his haunches, yawned and looked inquiringly about him. Then still gazing dreamily off into space, he cautiously slipped a bottle out of his hip pocket. Around its neck was wrapped a dirty bill. Beside one of the hills of corn he slyly scooped with his hand a shallow hole and buried the bottle. Then he arose and went around the house past the front veranda.

"Pretty dam hot hoe garden. Go get drinkum water, rest little," he remarked to Sam Goar in passing.

"Go to it," the proprietor acquiesced, apparently uninterested.

But after Joe had disappeared in the underbrush on the way to the spring up the hillside, Sam unlimbered himself and slouched around into the garden for a moment to inspect his helper's work.

A little later Joe returned to his hoeing, pocketing the bottle as he picked up his hoe. Now the dollar was gone and the bottle was full of red liquor. Thus did Sam Goar keep his garden cultivated and reap a goodly revenue out of it entirely

apart and separate from the returns from vegetables raised therein. The penalty for selling liquor to Indians was particularly severe.

By the time Joe had finished his row of corn he decided he was through for the day.

"Too dam hot," he explained to Goar for the benefit of any chance listeners.

"Mebbe so you wantum some other nice work done not so hot," he said hopefully after a pause.

Sam Goar was doing some thinking.

"Come to the side door after dark to-night," he directed after a moment.

That night after a long conference with Goar, Firewater Joe departed with a commission from the Hookfinger chief to get himself employed in some capacity or other at the Flanders well and report to Goar anything he could pick up as to the progress of the drilling. And within a week Joe had fulfilled the first part of the assignment by getting a job with the drillers as general handy man.

So it came about that Firewater Joe went Sam Goar one better. Whereas the latter was merely serving two opposing masters, Joe was serving three, the two fighting oil factions and Mert Dibble, who was fighting them both.

CHAPTER X.

"PINE TREES GROW TALL."

SINCE the Night Rider raid on the Flanders well the guard around the place had been doubled, and as the drilling progressed the farm was more and more carefully picketed, so that a stranger had no more chance of getting in range of the well than he would of passing into an army encampment unchallenged. Even of the hired guards only a trusted few were allowed around the well itself. The derrick stood back in the woods entirely hidden by tall trees. Any spy seeking to get information as to progress of the work or its ultimate success would have a hard time of it.

So it came about that Firewater Joe, though hired on Sam Goar's recommendation to Flannigan, the boss driller, as being discreet and absolutely with the Dunsmore

crowd, never found his duties taking him in sight of the well. He had been hired to run errands, principally canoe trips with supplies and mail between the farm and the village.

But under cover of darkness it was amazing to what extent Indian cunning could go in getting desired information. Dodging from tree to tree and crawling through the brush on his stomach, Joe managed to make a close inspection of progress each night with the aid of an electric torch furnished by Mert Dibble. So each night Mert received a full and accurate report of the distance made during the day, and Sam Goar got an equally full and perfectly inaccurate report, which he passed on to his second employer, Haslip of the Flowerville Company, with such further modifications as seemed expedient to him.

Goar meantime had not been personally idle. Before beginning the execution of Haslip's commission to secure options on as much farm land as possible, he sent for Dunsmore, his first employer and dupe, who like all with whom Goar dealt, preferred to come to him and come in the dark.

"I been gittin' a line on the Flowerville Company crowd," Goar said when the oil man was safely closeted in his little side room. "Haslip was in town last week. One o' my men is planted at the Senabau-gua Hotel. He spotted Haslip an' listened from the next room to him talkin' to another city feller. They're plannin' to snoop 'round an' git options on oil rights to as many places as they can around the valley while you fellers is drillin'. Then if they git wind you struck ile, they'll sew up these options on ye an' make ye come to terms with 'em. Now here's what I kin do. They been talkin' 'round among some o' the farmers tellin' 'em you fellers is crooks an' persuadin' 'em to tie up with 'em. They ain't actually hooked any options yit. You advance me the money to buy up options an' I'll slip 'round ahead o' their man that's goin' to start out after 'em next week. I'll take the options in my name as a blind. Anybody I find leanin' to the other crowd I'll tell 'em I'm representin' that crowd. If they're for you I'll tell 'em I am, too. See? We git 'em goin' an' comin'. See?

Goin' an' comin' an' returnin' back, as the feller says. I'll tell each sucker he's the only one we're lettin' in on the inside an' fer him to keep his trap shut. That'll git 'em."

Dunsmore was a little reluctant at first to put so much responsibility into the hands of Goar, about whose integrity he had no delusions; but he estimated that the Hook-finger had everything to gain and nothing to lose in this instance by playing square and getting a good bonus for delivering the goods. He was careful to keep Sam in the dark about the progress of the well. Anyhow, the situation was critical, and there seemed nothing else to do. It would not do to tip the other crowd to his move by openly taking options in his own name and perhaps starting a ruinous competition prematurely. On the success of this first well depended how much he was willing to pay for options. Once let it be a success and that fact became known, and the price of oil rights would go sky high. It would be well to nail down as many options as the amount they were willing to risk would pay for. Then precautions must be redoubled to keep secret the success of the well if they did strike oil, until they could secure the rest at the same moderate price.

Dunsmore went out to the Flanders farm to inspect the well. He found there encouraging signs that the well might yield something worth while.

"See here, Flannigan," he said to the drill boss when they were alone. "It's more important than ever that we keep it dark when this comes off if it's big. Every day you keep it from the public after she blows, there's a hundred dollars bonus in it for you. If she's a flivver, you understand, we must keep that dark, too. I'll manage to let a pretty substantial rumor leak out in case that she's gone big, and while the public still believes it, we can unload our options and get out from under. We'll just let the other crowd hold the bag in that case.

"Now here's the dope. I've got to be in Flowerville this next week. If she blows big in that time, send me a wire hot foot. Have that Indian runner of yours right on hand ready to shoot it down to the village.

If she's big, wire: 'Pine trees grow tall.' If she's a flivver, say: 'Maples are budding.' Got that?"

And in the meantime, Sam Goar, the double-faced emissary of the rival prospectors, was making hay while the sun shone, making it in large and imposing piles. Each farmer he approached knew he was a crook, and that he was being let in on a shady deal of some sort; but the point was, as Sam represented, he was being let in exclusively, inasmuch as the oil people had learned that his was the particular location they most wanted. And Sam knew his men well enough not to approach anybody whose conscience was too immaculate.

As a result, every day or two Sam displayed to each of his rival employers in turn a bunch of options, and promptly from each received a roll of bills with which to pay for those options. In the course of the week a good half the oil rights of the valley had been thus tied up in the name of Sam Goar.

Toward the end of the week Firewater Joe rushed to the nightly meeting with Mert in unusual haste and in a state bordering as near on excitement as the stoic Indian ever attained.

"Oil runnin' good," he reported. "Boss Flannigan he get ready shoot well to-night, mebbe midnight. I got be ready then take telegram to village. I bring him to you first. Now I run tell Sam Goar well no dam good, an' they mebbe drill week more then give 'em up."

Midnight came, and Mert, listening in the far edge of his woodlot near the Flanders line, heard a dull muffled rumble like distant thunder in the direction of his neighbor's woods. He knew that Joe's prediction had proved true. The well had been shot. He hurried to the appointed place for meeting the Indian, and waited with feverish impatience to learn whether the well had been a success. In spite of bitter inherited antagonism to the oil men his imagination was fired with the thought that perhaps less than half a mile away a fortune was even now spouting into the air. If only these oil men weren't crooks! If he could only find an honest prospector, he might—but the thought died half formed.

He had barely reached his stand by the river when he heard the hurried dip of a paddle, and a moment later Joe grounded his canoe in the shallows by his feet.

"She go big," the scout reported. "I crawl into bush by derrick an' she mos' pour oil all over me. I come out pretty fast, you bet. She fly up top derrick. Mr. Flannigan he give me this paper go to telegraph office."

He handed Mert a sealed envelope which the latter opened without a qualm.

"Pine trees grow tall," it read.

Mert thought a moment and then began to chuckle.

"I reckon, Joe," he said, "that we kin git the most fun out o' this, an' do the most damage, by lettin' everybody know about it. I'll fix this telegram and the operator 'll do the rest. You better fix yourself right by telling Sam Goar some time to-morrow you made a mistake. Somebody played a trick on you about the well. Don't want him to think you been trickin' him, 'cause you want to use him some more."

Then Mert took a pencil from his pocket and imitating crudely the scrawl of the oil boss, added to the cryptic words, "Pine trees grow tall," this addendum, "She's spoutin' clean over the derrick."

CHAPTER XI.

THE OIL STAMPEDE.

WHEN Mert Dibble, moved both by a whimsical impulse and a desire for revenge against the tricky oil promoters, spread broadcast to the world by his addendum to Flannigan's telegram, the fact that oil in paying quantities had at last been struck in Goar Valley, he was unaware of the fact that Sam Goar had in his pocket all the most desirable options, and that his trick was playing admirably into the hands of that wily old scamp. Mert had seen that his fight to keep the crooked oil men out of the valley had been lost. He had hoped as a last resort to upset their plans and cut into their profits sadly by giving publicity to the fact that the trial well was a success. This would compel them to compete at once in their

race for further oil rights against a money-mad public. Further than that it would tip off the farmers as to the real value of the rights they had to sell and give them a better chance at a square deal with more honest prospectors.

That there might be honest oil prospectors Mert Dibble was willing to concede. He was subtly, half-consciously influenced by the proof that there actually was oil in paying quantities under Goar Valley. The men of his father's generation conceded neither of these points. The experience of their neighbors over the hills with the crooked prospectors had made them believe that even if they had oil to sell they would be cheated in the selling. The experience of the one farmer in their valley with a dry well had proven to their satisfaction that there was no paying oil in the valley.

Mert had been brought up to believe these two propositions, and had begun his fight along those lines. Now, while he saw the error of the disbelief in the presence of oil, he had tangible proof instead of mere prejudice that these particular oil men who were exploiting Goar Valley were crooks and wreckers. The warning of his stepmother, Firewater Joe's reports of the plot with Sam Goar, the evident intention to corner the oil rights of the valley by fair means or foul—here was proof positive.

From now on Mert Dibble's fight centered on defeating a gang of crooks and giving his neighbors and—perhaps—himself an honest deal if, as seemed inevitable, his beloved valley must become a region of derricks instead of peaceful farms.

And in his belief that in altering Flannigan's telegram he would start something, he was entirely correct. When the bored and drowsy night operator at Senabaugua station read the remarkable telegram handed him by Firewater Joe, he suddenly was wide awake. He lost no time in getting the wire off to Dunsmore, then sent several wires to fellow operators of his at different points along the line, close friends to whom he had previously given the tip that there might presently be something doing in Goar Valley that would interest them and their friends to the extent of investing some of their savings.

Then he routed out others of his intimates around town by telephone and gave them the glad news.

It so happened, too, that the night operator who received the message in Flowerville was numbered among the pals of the Senabaugua man. It happened, too, not unnaturally, being a friend of the first man, that he was not given to splitting hairs in matters of honor. But he was less altruistic than his brother operator in Senabaugua. He had not the slightest intention of giving his rich information away.

On receiving the original tip from his friend down the line, he got in touch with a number of gentlemen commanding money and anxious to command considerably more of it, and arranged that he should for certain prices, based on the carrying power of the traffic, tip them off in advance if he got any positive information.

Consequently the rush message to Dunsmore somehow got sidetracked in the office for a considerable time, and failed to reach that eagerly waiting prospector until the middle of the forenoon. And by that time several automobile parties from Flowerville, representing a total of no mean amount of liquid capital, had already arrived in Goar Valley, and were making frenzied bids for positions on the ground floor of the oil boom.

And as usual, when confidential information is issued to a considerable number of persons, there were numerous leaks. Long before the arrival of Dunsmore and Haslip the news of the Flanders gusher was public property in town and country through a radius of some two hundred miles around Goar Valley.

All Senabaugua invaded the valley, and together with neighboring farmers, thronged about the redoubled sentry line that surrounded the Flanders farm, hoping in vain to catch a glimpse of the marvelous gusher. They were joined in steadily growing streams by residents of the outlying farms and villages. Trains into Senabaugua from both directions were adding to the mob.

The automobile parties from Flowerville, inspired by the telegrapher's expensive tips, formed the nucleus of the capitalistic group and those best able to talk big money.

Standing on the seats of their cars, they were trying to shout each other down in frenzied bids for farm land or the oil rights thereto. Goar Valley real estate began to soar unbelievably. Those who had been wheedled by Sam Goar into selling options on their places in advance stood by in stunned silence while their more fortunate neighbors sold out at prices ranging from ten to a hundred times those at which the wily Hookfinger chief had struck his bargains.

Toward noon a new element was added to the frantic tumult. A swart paunchy man with a voice like the bellow of a bull, stationed his car a little way from the bidders for oil rights.

"Now you got some money, what ye gonna do with it?" he roared. "You fellers that's sold yer land or yer oil rights ain't through yet, not by a jug full. Ye ain't even begun to skim the cream offen the milk pan yet.

"There's a rich deposit of oil under this valley, as yonder gusher proves. No man knows which way that vein runs. It may run under your farm, under yours, under yours. In that case you're in luck. But it may not. It can't run under all of 'em. A lot of you're goin' to get stung with dry wells just as sure as God made little apples.

"Now here's a chance to come in out o' the rain, a chance for all to share in a sure thing. I'm authorized to promote a drilling company to combine all these oil rights. These gentlemen who have bought your rights are not drillers. They're speculators. That's all right, too. They'll come in with us and let us handle their rights. Now we need capital for that. You men here have the capital. It's being paid to you. Why not use it to become partners of the men who have bought your rights, and share in their profits? Why not?"

But at this climax in the paunchy gentleman's eloquence there was a dramatic interruption. Two big motor cars roared up, one close behind the other, and stopped in the edge of the crowd. Out of the first leaped with ludicrous lack of his customary dignity Dunsmore, the independent oil operator and proprietor of the Flanders

gusher. A scant hour before he had received the belated and garbled telegram informing him, after it had scattered the news broadcast, that his Goar Valley experiment was a success.

Behind him as he worked his way through the crowd came the dapper little Haslip, his rival, representative of the Old Flowerville Oil Development Company. His information through the deluded Sam Goar had also been delayed. They had arrived after the harvest in oil options had already been reaped—reaped, it is true, at vastly greater expense than they had hoped to reap it for themselves by their policy of secrecy. But it was immediately evident that each still believed that he held options on a good half of Goar Valley and at a low figure, the options the double-dealing Sam Goar had obtained.

The two racing rivals arrived just in time to hear the peroration of the fat corporation promoter. They were confronting the orator as he roared: "These gentlemen who have bought your rights are not drillers."

"Whadye mean, not drillers?" Dunsmore demanded. "I'm a driller, and I hold options on half the land in this valley."

At that Haslip bristled.

"You hold options? Where did you get options? I have everything on sale up to this morning nailed down tight, a good half the rights of the valley. Ask Sam Goar. He was my agent in the matter. Where is Sam Goar?"

Dunsmore's expansive face had grown for a moment more purple than ever. Then it suddenly went white.

"Sam—Goar!" he gasped. "Oh, good Lord!"

The rumor of Sam Goar's strategic position spread through the crowd and reached the ears of the other speculators from the city. Consequently when Dunsmore and Haslip leaped into their cars almost simultaneously a few minutes later and started for Sam Goar's place, the rival cars were a part of a considerable procession.

When the roaring gasoline cavalcade wound its way in low gear and with boiling radiators up the last steep loop of moun-

tain road and stopped in front of the rambling inn, its proprietor was sitting in his easy chair, backtilted and smiling sardonically as he rammed a charge of tobacco into the old corn cob pipe with the forefinger of the thumbless hand. It was as some ancient spider might have awaited the arrival to his web of an unusually promising swarm of flies.

The harried speculators leaped from their cars and surrounded the graceless old scamp, all shouting at once, the burden of the tumult being constantly rising bids for the options they understood Goar possessed.

"Yes," he drawled finally, "I got options on half the oil rights in Goar Valley to sell to the highest bidder. I want to talk to these here two gentlemen a minute first, as they both been to see me before. Then I'll be back an' we'll have a little auction."

He led the way to his den, Dunsmore and Haslip following. The two rivals had suddenly turned thoughtfully silent. After their first burst of wrath it dawned on each that he couldn't afford to have a frank talk before the other.

"Now, listen a minute, you two," Goar sneered after he had enjoyed the situation silently for a little. "I heard each o' you fellers sayin' somethin' out there about ownin' options, near's I could make out in the hubbub—somethin' about furnishin' me money to pay fer 'em. I ain't got any record o' no such transaction, an' I figger you ain't either.

"Each o' you fellers tried to beat the hard-workin' farmers here out o' a fair price fer their oil rights. You each tried to get me to do some dirty work fer you, as I could prove if I wanted to. You wouldn't want to air none o' that in court, an' it ain't necessary. I got these options in my own name, an' you ain't neither o' you got a smidgin o' proof that I didn't buy 'em with my own money fer myself. Now, if you want a chance at 'em, fer the best figger ye kin git, jest waltz back there on the porch an' join the auction."

"I'll put you in jail for this, you old scoundrel!" Haslip fumed.

But Dunsmore was a better sport. His

sense of humor was reasserting itself. He chuckled.

"Not this trip you won't, Haslip. I think for the present we better take off our hats to Sam, and then, as he advised, waltz."

CHAPTER XII.

TRIAL BY FIRE.

RELUCTANTLY, still glaring alternately first at Dunsmore, then at Sam Goar, Haslip followed his rival's advice. Dunsmore in the lead, they returned to the veranda. But as Dunsmore reached the door he paused a moment in deep thought, eying the group waiting expectantly to bid for Sam Goar's oil rights. Then he turned back to his companions.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I've thought of something. Let's return to the council chamber.

"Now, then," Dunsmore went on when they were again closeted, "we are all three practical men. At least Sam, here, has proved he is. He has proved he's too practical to have playing against us. As for you and your company, Haslip, you know I haven't had any love for you fellows since we split over your policy in handling that Dibble woman.

"If you'd taken my advice and been square with her I don't doubt we'd be drilling on the Dibble farm at the present moment.

"But that's all by—a dead issue. We might just as well make up our minds that those Dibble wills got lost or destroyed, and drop the woman as of no further use to either of us. Now we are cutting our own throats by keeping up the fight against each other.

"As it stands we have the lead over you at the moment because we have a real well. But we can't afford to waste our energies fighting you when we could gain more by combining.

"It would be cheaper to combine forces behind the scenes and make Sam, here, realize that there is something good in it for him—good enough in the long run to make him see that it would pay him to

sell his options to the combination at a fair rate, part cash and part stock in the company. Fix it so Sam would have everything to gain and nothing to lose by playing honest, and then watch him like hawks. Hey, Sam?"

"Might be arranged," Sam conceded.

"I'll take it up with my directors," Haslip granted at last. "I'd rather see you in Hades, Dunsmore, to be frank, but business is business."

"Your choice of alternatives is a wise one," Dunsmore laughed. "Now, one more idea. We fellows have got ourselves discredited here, and we better go under cover. Besides, we're being fought tooth and nail by young Dibble, and he's a dangerous boy. I don't know how he did it, but I'm certain he engineered the fixing of that telegram of mine so as to spill the beans all over the table. I'll get him yet.

"But, meantime, we can throw him off the scent and mollify these farmers we want to use by seeming to get out from under. We'll take the tip of that fly-by-night promoter who seemed to have 'em on the run this morning.

"We'll organize a new company under cover and buy the whole works, we apparently going into retirement. I'll look up that promoter this afternoon and see if we can use him. Then while we're trying out other wells here and there, we'll keep after the Dibble place."

"I don't understand yet why the young lunatic won't sell with the offers we've made. Is he just holding out on us for a bigger stake?" Haslip ruminated.

"I'm afraid you don't understand sentiment, particularly in the cramped rural mind, Haslip," Dunsmore remarked. "The young fellow is ingrown. He doesn't care a hang for anything in the world but the old place, and he's sworn to keep it just as his father left it.

"I'm engaged in a little project through a trusted agent to shake him out of his state of mind and give him an interest in life that may make him want some of the filthy lucre. It's best not to go into that here."

"If it's the old place that sticks in his crop, it's a pity one of those young forest fires they always put out so promptly

around here couldn't sweep down and overrun his joint, wipe it out. That would knock away the foundation of his sentiment and make him darned glad to sell," Haslip commented flippantly.

Dunsmore looked at him sharply, then searchingly at Sam Goar.

Sam merely smiled faintly and looked thoughtfully away.

"Well, we've no time for joking," Dunsmore hastened to say, as if the subject were closed.

But Sam Goar was still thinking.

"You see," he said presently, "I've often thought a leetle mite of a fire up on the side of the hill opposite Dibble's might spread an' do that identical thing. They's a neck o' the woods, all pine an' like tinder this time o' the year stretchin' down from the mountain straight across one side o' Dibble farm next to Flanders's an' runnin' right up through the wood lot to the house an' barns."

Dunsmore looked Gore in the eye again searchingly.

Sam had now assumed a poker face.

"Well," the former sighed again, "Providence isn't arranging forest fires for our benefit this season. If He would, though, I'd promise a large sum of money to His favorite church."

Again he searched the poker face of Sam Goar. Then the subject was dropped for discussion of details for the consolidation scheme.

After the conspirators had departed, and the other seekers after options had been told it was all off, Sam Goar paced the floor of his den for some time in deep thought. Finally he seemed to have made up his mind about something. He returned to the veranda chair and alternately dozed and smoked until supper time. Several times he stepped out into the road and looked at the sky and noted the direction of the breeze.

Early in the evening he told his wife he was going to do some figuring in his den and then go to bed early, and must not be disturbed. Sam usually slept on a narrow cot in the corner of this sanctum of his.

As soon as the pitch blackness of a cloudy woodland night had settled down

Sam rose, fussed around his room for a bit in apparent aimlessness, then put out his light and sat down hard on his creaking cot. A minute later he arose, tiptoed to the door, opened it softly, and stepped out, closing and locking the door behind him.

Outside he stood listening. The breeze that had blown fitfully from the south all the afternoon had freshened with night-fall, as he expected, and now swept down over the mountain in a half gale.

Sam slipped out to the road swiftly and silently, and advanced stealthily along the winding way, walking in the grass at the side so as to leave no tracks, stopping at frequent intervals to listen and make certain that he came on no chance passer un-awares.

Some half mile on beyond his place he slowed down and felt his way along the underbrush beside the road until he came to a narrow path leading down the steep slope. Down this he went silently as a panther on the hunt until he came to a point where a clump of young pines grew in a hollow in the hillside.

Feeling about in the darkness till he located the branches of one of these low-growing trees, from the deep pocket of his coat he drew a brown paper package full of greasy rags and loosened up the package. This mass he lodged in the little tree where the dry pine needles were thickest. Into the midst of these rags he thrust a small package of loose gunpowder from which hung a foot of fuse.

Crouching low and covering his hands with the tail of his coat, he struck a match. Cupping it in his hands so as to hide the light, he carried it to the fuse. Then while the tiny spark sputtered up the fuse Sam climbed the path to the road as swiftly and silently as he came. At the top of the path he waited until a tiny flash followed at once by a brighter glow told him his fuse had worked.

Then he hurried for home.

A half hour later Sam, back in his room and undressed, heard swift footsteps across his yard. Some one hammered on his door.

Sam feigned a loud snore in answer. The rapping was repeated louder than before.

Sam stirred heavily, and then in a drowsy voice demanded who was there.

"Tom Goar, Sam. Woods on fire. Bet-ter telephone town."

"Gosh-all-hemlock!" Sam Goar shouted, jumping up, lighting the lamp, and admitting his cousin, who lived in a cabin just above the spot where Sam had started his fire. Then Sam, still in his night shirt, called his wife and registered another witness to the fact that he was undressed and had just awakened from a sound sleep. Finally he telephoned to Senabaugua and to several of the farmers in the valley before stopping to dress.

When Sam stepped out of his house the success of his incendiary efforts was more than apparent. What he saw beyond and below him was a great wall of flame cutting its way down the mountainside in an ever widening path as it advanced. The sky that had been pitch black when Sam sneaked back to his house, a half hour before, now glowed a blood red.

Sam hurried to his barn, mounted a riding horse, and galloped off to put himself in evidence as one of the fire-fighters.

Down in the valley Mert Dibble was one of the first to awake, and looking from his bedroom window he saw a wave of fire rolling down the mountain a scant mile away and directly toward the belt of woods running through his farm to his very door. He, too, dashed to the telephone and began sending out the alarm.

By the time the fight was organized the blaze had nearly reached the valley floor. For an hour the fighters worked madly, scraping back the forest carpet of pine needles and dead leaves, hoeing and chopping their way through the underbrush to establish a fire line.

Mert Dibble had taken command, and was everywhere at once. Let a man falter, he was at his side encouraging him by his example. Now he dashed back to trample out a smoldering fagot; now he leaped in and hewed away a clump of bushes where the flames curled over his head. He had forgotten himself completely in the joy of fighting again. His clothes were smoldering. His skin was blistered. He breathed the scorching air in short gasps.

But little by little they were forced back till it became evident that they could not save the woods on Dibble farm, and must center on saving the buildings themselves. So, concentrating their forces on the narrow neck of woods just below the Dibble buildings, they cut and burned before the fire reached them a swath so wide that, with a little vigilance during the next hour, the buildings would be safe.

Then they relaxed a bit and watched the flames slowly die from lack of sustenance. As they watched no one noticed the little tongues of flame obscured by and partly hidden the other side of the fire wall that were licking their way across a stubble field that separated the Dibble woodland from that on the Flanders farm in the center of which was the oil well. The well had been capped late that afternoon, thus checking further waste of oil. A heavy log had been chained over the cap to anchor it down.

But the leaves and soil around the well for many rods were soaked with waste oil. Through the fence crept the tongues of flame from the stubble field. For a few moments they ran here and there through the leaves of the wood lot or crackled into bonfires in the scant underbrush.

Then they struck the oil-soaked area. There was a flash of vivid flame that appeared to rise simultaneously from all parts of the wood lot. For the first time the watchers at the Dibble farm saw the destruction that threatened the Flanders property, including the famous gusher. The jaded fighters picked up their grub hoes and started to dash across the fields.

Mert waved the men back.

"The well's going to blow any minute now. She'll fire burning oil all over the valley, darn near. Get 'way back."

He was barely in time with his warning. There was a terrific roar and a volcano of flame leaped up high above the tree tops, mushroomed out and spread broadcast a shower of liquid flame, some of it falling a quarter of a mile away.

The crowd watched, fascinated, while the great geyser of fire slowly subsided a little until it became a steady blaze of oil and gas some fifty feet high, like the flame of a

giant candle lighting the valley as if it had been noonday for a mile around.

Suddenly a woman's scream rang out in the watching crowd. It was Mrs. Flanders.

"The house! The house! Violet's in there with her father!"

The group faced about. Already the Flanders house and outbuildings were enveloped in a mass of flame. They had been deluged with the burning oil. But even before the rest of the group recovered from the stupor of the first shock Mert Dibble was racing across the fields toward the burning building.

He stopped for no preparation. The first

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

door he came to he smashed in and entered, to be met by a blast of dense smoke. Alternately shouting and holding his breath, he felt his way through the choking blackness to the stairs leading to the room of Thomas Worthington as he remembered it when he had visited him there.

He found the stair door and opened it. He was driven back by a burst of flame. Three times he made a dash for it and was each time worsted. His breath was going. His clothing was afire. A third time he got halfway up.

Then the burning steps gave way under him; he felt himself dropping.

Then merciful unconsciousness.

Lure of the Moon Flower

by Rebecca Traill Hodges



THE Christopher Culbertsons, of the Christopher Culbertson Coffee Company, were enormously rich. They were the sort of rich who ride in one of these elongated motor cars, a wooden-faced chauffeur exposed to the free fancy of the elements at the wheel, and the sheltered occupants of the snug interior trailing on a whole half block in the rear. In spite of such drawbacks they were quite human.

The Culbertsons boasted, among other much-to-be-desired things, a huge summer mansion, known as a "cottage," right by the sea, with its own broad private bathing beach, two devilishly impossible children,

Genevieve and Christopher, Jr., the elusive parasites commonly called "house guests," and a young brother-in-law.

The latter asset, Fred Hammond, after an apprenticeship served impartially in front-line trenches and across barbed-wire strewn vistas, was hustled off to Central America at his sister's behest, to fill the post of manager on one of the famous coffee plantations. Needing a change of climate and a job about equally bad, he had jumped at the chance. In consequence, what was most to the point, he had succeeded, much to his employer's surprise, far beyond the wildest hopes.

Now, after due time, and according to the well-known custom of combining business with pleasure, young Hammond was on a leave of absence, away from the native heath of the coffee bean and the banana. This vacation of two months or so he was spending mostly with his sister Marion and her family at the aforementioned Culbertson summer home.

This arrangement was very satisfactory all around. The pair of young imps, his niece and nephew, Fred discovered, to his great joy, had been packed away with their governess on a camping trip. This was hard on the governess, Fred chuckled to himself with glee, but a great institution for the rest of humanity.

Marion Culbertson adored her brother. She always had, on up from the mud-pie era through the various stages. Certainly she had hardly any fault whatsoever to find with him now. Good looking, debonair, and blessed with the most ingratiating smile and manner, what more could a sister ask for?

"He gets better all the time," she confided to her husband one evening as Fred's contagious laugh came rolling in from the open porch where he was holding down the job of entertainer to two young creatures of the flapper variety. "He's like cheese or wine, you know."

"My dear"—and Christopher Culbertson tapped the ashes off the end of his cigar and smiled blandly at his wife—"don't tell anybody else that speech. Fred could never live a remark like that down! Cheese!"

"There's just one thing about him that worries me," she went on, paying no attention to the advice or adviser, "and that is that he isn't married. I'm doing my best for him, though. Just see the rafts of girls we've had here at the house! Every single eligible thing in petticoats or one-piece suits!"

And she surely had! No merchant displaying his wares could have been more eager to please. The house had literally dripped girls of all ages and sizes and previous conditions of servitude. The exhibition had been conducted with diplomacy and finesse.

It had been a howling success as far as the two men were concerned. Both Christopher and Fred agreed openly that they were having the time of their lives. Never had such charming, eye-filling specimens had the unmolested run of the Culbertson house for so entrancingly long a period. It was a joyous experience. Whichever way one looked or turned there appeared an engaging young nymph. Life, in consequence, was one delightful thrill after another.

Marion sometimes questioned whether perhaps such strenuous methods were wholly advisable—husbands were so funny about things—and a pretty girl is a pretty girl! But she consoled herself that the present state, so fraught with unpleasant disadvantages, could not last forever, and Fred was worth 'most any effort; so she took another grim breath and went at it again, keeping a blind eye on Chris's flirtations.

Of course there was safety in numbers when the man in question was one's impressionable husband. But a bachelor brother's case was different. Things don't progress rapidly in the matrimonial direction when a perfectly normal male is most evidently having a corking good time of it, Marion sighed futilely, with all the bunch, impartially.

The more the merrier, was Fred's very apparent motto. He loved them all, every one of them, from the bobbed-hair flappers on up through the list to that young and merry widow, Agatha Baird. Each one had her own copyrighted type of charm, and it was a difficult but glorious job, Fred often remarked, to be called upon to do any eliminating. Sometimes one star seemed to be in the ascendancy and then another. But why worry a man so? Let well enough alone.

Of course wives as wives had their advantages. A good-looking girl to sit at the head of his table was not to be despised. There was little Jane Drew, for instance, she of the black locks and dimpled knees. He knew they were dimpled—any one who was not blind could see that for himself. And then that red-headed Marguerite was some winner herself. She sure was pos-

sessed of the most provoking combination of slimness and curves and satin-skinned loveliness any man could wish. Besides, there was the widow—some girl!

He didn't believe, however, he'd want to marry a widow. You would always wonder and wonder, whenever you kissed her, whether it would be you or the other man she'd be thinking about.

After all, he groaned, it was the dreadful finality of the whole performance that got you. Marry one of them, and forever after you were done for. It was all right to smoke with a girl on the terrace—but it would be terribly stupid to have that same girl forever at your heels. Besides, he had not quite made up his mind whether he would want a wife that smoked. Of course everybody did it—even Marion; but your wife— He decided that he must have a hidden, old-fashioned strain still lurking in him.

"There's one point you've never seemed to touch on," Fred remarked one day, as he and Marion and Chris were in undisputed possession of the porch. "And that is, how do you know that any of these girls would have me, in the first place? Of course I know I'm a very desirable parlor pet, but even I sometimes wonder if all these dozens of lovely females would jump for me as you say they would."

He grinned across his sister's head at his brother-in-law.

"You don't realize," he continued, twirling his tennis racket, "how hard it is to stay modest and shy and retiring, dear sister, in the midst of such plenty. According to you, all I have to do is whistle. Then watch the scramble."

"Don't be silly," she retorted. "Every single girl I've had up here likes you—and they're the pick of the country, too. Oh, you are so provoking, Fred Hammond. Why don't you choose one of them and get it over with? If you don't, you deserve to get tied up with some terrible half-breed Spaniard down there in Central American wilds. Well, I've surely done my share," she sighed with a shrug. "Although, of course, as far as that goes, I don't think any one is good enough for you."

Both men hooted.

"See what you've got to live up to?" Chris warned. "I wouldn't want a handicap like that."

"You two men make me so mad," Marion exploded. "Here I'm doing everything under the sun to make it pleasant for Fred, and trying to arrange things so that some awful creature down on your old coffee plantations won't grab him up—and you both look on it as a joke."

"Maybe he prefers to do his own arranging," Chris explained, his eyes twinkling. "Such is often the case."

"The trouble with him is," his wife replied coldly, "he doesn't know what he wants. I doubt if he ever saw a girl who gives him a thrill twice running. He is always on the lookout for the next one. He's hopeless."

But she was mistaken. As astute and forceful and sisterly as Marion Culbertson was, there was one episode in Fred's life that was utterly unknown to her.

He did know what he wanted. That was what was back of all his dilly-dallying; apparent irresponsibility, and was causing all the trouble. Unspoken and unbreathed to a soul, Fred Hammond cherished deep down in his heart a lovely, romantic ideal. In fact, he had not only seen her and spoken to her, but he had kissed her. The memory of that kiss thrilled him even yet. What her name was he had not the faintest idea—but he had kissed her—and he could never forget.

It had happened like this:

Back a few years, in the time of training camps and feverish war brides, a certain company of khaki-clad men had hiked through a certain secluded town one moonlight evening.

Its streets were calm and quiet and tree shaded, with fine old houses set back on velvety lawns. The brilliant moon, shining down on the thick leafy branches, made a fairy tracery on pavements and marchers alike.

And they sure were weary! A four days' hike, up and down hills, across unfamiliar country, one village dovetailing into the next, endlessly, on and on—and any normal person would welcome a halt.

So, when finally the cheering command

came, the gods stepped in and took a hand. They played their cards so that Fred's particular footsteps should pause before an old stone house set back in a hedge-bordered yard. There was a broad low porch supported by pillars, and entwining and encircling them and rambling in unrestrained confusion across the railing grew masses of uncontrolled moon vines. This thick, leafy screen was studded with millions of waxy, fairy-like moon flowers. They gleamed against their dark background like pearls on dusky velvet. And pouring down on everything, transforming the homeliest details with dreamlike beauty, was the gorgeous moon.

The effect was entrancing, and Fred leaned for a minute on his gun, drinking it all in.

Here was romance and moonlight—Youth and Mars! All that was needed to complete the effect was Venus.

And then she appeared!

Fred remembered having seen pictures and plays dealing with the romantic Civil War period—a girl in white standing by the pillars of some old veranda. She was always young and beautiful, and always dressed in white—an elusive vision of desirable loveliness.

Now here, right before his enthralled eyes, was a modern version of the same thing. Here was the martial atmosphere—the old homestead—the vine-covered porch—the girl framed in the wonderful moon-flower-studded background.

It was more than any impressionable youth could stand. Leaving his resting comrades squatting at ease on the ground, without a further thought, Fred bounded over the low iron gate, and hat in hand, strode up the path.

Each step brought him nearer, and only proved how much lovelier she really was. To his palpitating heart she seemed the embodiment of all the graces—a slim, youthful figure leaning one hand against the vine-covered pillar, with smiling dark eyes and wavy hair standing out like a soft halo.

He wished that he could tell her all he thought—how exquisite she was—how she thrilled his soul—what a glorious picture

she made among the myriads of moon flowers. Instead, he said, "I'm awfully thirsty. Please, may I have a drink?"

He twisted his hat in his hands, his eyes fixed on her in a worshipping stare. He hoped she could not hear the thumping in his chest.

From the top step she smiled down on him. "If I had to march as far as you boys do each day," she remarked, "I'd pray to be a camel. Do sit down. You deserve two drinks."

She reappeared from the dim recesses of the house with two tall clinking glasses on a tray. Fred placed the latter on a wicker table while she explained, with a wave of her hand.

"They're both for you. One is lemonade—nice and cold—with a sprig of mint, if you like it. The other is plain water, equally cold, and guaranteed to be refreshing."

"And it is," he assured her, in ecstasy; "it sure is. I never tasted anything that hits the spot like this—both of them—the drinks, I mean," he added.

Then they both laughed, why, or at what, they could not have told. Wasn't it reason enough, just to be young and alive on a moon-dappled porch, and filled with the joy of living?

"Don't you suppose," the girl ventured, "that perhaps some of those other boys are thirsty, too? I could get a pitcher."

"Oh, no," the wily Fred answered, "none of them are. They never drink. Besides, there's not time. There's only a minute longer."

"I see," she laughed. "It is perfectly clear. You want the center of the stage, limelight and all."

"Oh, no," he corrected, gently but firmly. "I'm just a poor super—you are the star."

And so they talked on. It was amazing how much lasting damage can be done in less than five minutes. When eyes speak to eyes, and there are electric thrills in the air.

When the hated, crisp summons came from some iron-throated officer in the street to "Fall in," Fred groaned and obediently rose to his feet.

The girl who stood beside him, smiled up into his face and shyly put out her hand.

"Good-by and good luck," she said, lifting her eyes to his.

"Oh, please," he whispered, begging; "just something to remember you by—something I can see."

She broke off the largest, waxiest blossom that dangled near and thrust it through a buttonhole on his shirt. He felt her fingers tremble as they brushed against him, and he pressed them close in his hand. Outside on the street sounded the clatter of guns and the shuffle of feet, and the deep-toned murmurings of men's voices as they fell into line.

"Quick, sweetheart!" he cried, imploringly. "I must go. May I, please; just one before I leave you? I didn't know there was a girl in the world like you!"

He drew her, unresisting, into the shadow of the pillars, and folding her in a hungry embrace, kissed her.

"I'll never, never forget, dear," he stammered softly, "and I'll be back. Watch for me."

And then he was gone—tearing down the path and over the gate, out among the scores of others, swallowed up in the rapidly moving mass—the scent of her hair, the feeling of her lips, the charm of her lilting musical laughter just a memory.

Only the moon flower remained. He pressed it carefully in his little pocket case and planned to ask for another when he went back.

But he never went back. Immediate marching orders, with a speedy embarkation, spoiled all plans in that direction, and when months and months later he returned from overseas, he had not the remotest idea which town it was nor how to reach it. He cursed himself for not having asked her name, but those precious moments with her had been so brief. He had made all sorts of guarded inquiries, and had scoured the countryside about that particular section. And then came the opportunity to be connected with the famous and flourishing Culbertson Company—and he went.

And yet always, wherever he went, there lurked the faint possibility of per-

haps finding a clew. Whenever Marion mentioned some new girl there always was the chance.

Sometimes he almost wondered if he had dreamed it all—it was such a fanciful tale. And then he opened the case and looked at the faded waxy leaves and it all came back to him.

So that was why Mrs. Culbertson's schemes for her brother continued to fail. No girl with a cigarette poised between vermilion-stained lips could be a match for a soft-voiced, smiling ideal clothed in white and drenched in moonlight on a vine-hung porch.

Marion corralled him in the hall one morning and linked her arm in his.

"I have just two announcements to make," she said, drawing him into the sunny living room.

"Go ahead—shoot," he sighed. "More females applying for the job, I suppose."

"The children are coming home to-day," she continued, ignoring his exaggerated yawn, "and I do hope you'll be decent."

"Oh, I promise not to beat them," he agreed; "but they're the darnedest imps of Satan I ever saw! Why any girl as nice as you are can have such fiends as offspring I don't see. They both deserve good thrashings. Why don't you send them to school instead of having them towed about by a prim, fool sort of governess?"

"If you've finished with your free advice, little brother," she replied serenely, "I'll answer. In the first place it's horribly bad taste of you to talk as you do about your niece and nephew, and secondly they're not devils. They're just healthy normal children. No, you needn't roll your eyes—they are. And their governess is not prim—she's quite nice, and very capable; and, last of all, it's not any of your business anyway."

She paused for breath with an air of triumph and finality. "My second announcement is that I've invited the most attractive girl I know down here for next week. It's Corella Raymond—an awfully good friend of mine, a stunning beauty, clever, rich, and everything. She's been abroad for the last year or so, and she's terribly appealing. Every one's crazy

about her. She's about your age, Fred, and I know you'll like her. She's just returned from a long visit in England—otherwise I'd have asked her here weeks ago. Now your time is nearly up. This is the last effort I'm going to make in your behalf. If you turn down this chance you deserve to marry a mulatto."

"Hooray!" he shouted, sending a sofa cushion sailing after his sister's disappearing figure.

But this Corella Raymond business sounded good. Maybe—who could tell? Near his own age, charming, beautiful, everybody falling for her—yes, that was promising. He whistled at the thought. Besides, if she didn't turn out favorably, Marion had promised to leave him alone in peace. He wished next week would hurry up and come.

He ran across Marion along toward evening, hand in hand with Genevieve and Chris, Jr.

Fred dutifully shook hands with them and gave them a brief peck on their tanned cheeks as they surveyed him solemnly out of guileless eyes.

"The little dears are looking well," he remarked blandly, over their heads. "Well, I must be off," and he made his escape in the opposite direction. Thank Heaven, the imps never ate dinner with the grown-ups—he would be spared that trial. At breakfast, which they graced with their presence and their long-suffering governess, he could be conspicuous by his absence. Oh, he'd fix it all right.

He still wondered about this Raymond girl—would she or wouldn't she? It piqued his curiosity.

He slipped away from the three-handed bridge that Chris and Marion and the Widow Baird were deep in after dinner, and went on down to the white stretch of beach. There reached out the sea, little lapping waves running up on the sand, the row of bath houses silhouetted at the background, and a round moon sailing overhead.

Heavens! What a night! Made for adventure and love and romance! Just such a night as this when he had kissed that lovely unknown girl among the moon vines. He sighed and cursed the stupidity of fate

that had withheld from him even the name of the lucky town that housed her.

He watched, enchanted, the ripples shimmer along the silvery pathway on the water. Suddenly he turned and crossed over toward his own especial bath house, unlocked the door, and slipped into his swimming clothes and plunged in. Then, head down, he struck far out, hand over hand.

Later on, tingling and invigorated, he ran back, alive to his very finger tips. He noticed the door next his own bath house was ajar. That was one thing Marion was hard boiled about—never to leave them open. It seemed she feared burglars or something. Dutifully he closed it and the lock clicked.

"Well, one good deed done," he thought, applying a rough and vigorous towel. He was slipping into his clothes when he heard an exclamation accompanied by a shaking of the latch on the adjoining door.

"Ye gods!" breathed a soft, emphatic feminine voice. "If those children have locked me out they deserve to be tarred and feathered!"

Fred cautiously pushed open his door a crack and peered out.

There, in the full glare of the moon, stood a girl. She wore the briefest of abbreviated one-piece costumes it had ever been his good luck to gaze upon, and where the meager suit ended there gleamed the whitest of shapely flesh. It reminded him of magnolia blossoms or satin.

With his tie in his hand, and a pleasant leaping in his heart, he opened the door wide and stepped out.

"Greetings, mermaid!"

She looked up quickly from the door, which she continued to rattle.

"Greetings yourself!" she retorted. "Only when you're going to burst out on me like that sound a warning. You nearly gave me heart failure."

"We both have the same disease, then," he confided, his eyes on the dripping figure before him. "You've affected my heart, too.

"What a pity," he went on, seeing that his former remark was ignored, "that we could not have been gay water sprites at the same time. I've just finished dressing."

"You're lucky, that's all. I'd be, too, if those children had not shut this door. It never closed of itself."

He agreed gravely. "You're right about many things. Those Culbertson children are capable of anything. I know. I'm their unfortunate uncle."

"I know, too. I'm their governess."

"Poor creature," he sighed deeply. "I give you my sympathy."

"I'd lots rather you gave me my clothes. I can feel myself turning purple with the cold. Besides, the reason I go in swimming this time of night, anyway, is so that I can wear almost nothing and not have prying observers to bother about."

He grinned affably, and reached for the broom behind his door.

"Maybe, Miss Governess, I can fish your clothes out for you through that hole," and he pointed to the round opening over the door which served as window and ventilator alike. "I can further assure you that you aren't in the least purple; but you'll find a pile of fresh towels on the shelf in my own bathroom, and a nice warm woolly bathrobe that you're welcome to use. You'd better accept. I'd hate to feel I was responsible for an early death. And last, but not least," he called to her as she shivered her way into his bath house and closed the door, "if this is your usual time for bathing, from now on it is mine, too."

The towels, the rub down, and the woolly robe were all welcome, and presently, with the warm garment close about her, she peered out. She knew from the various sounds that things were happening.

On an upturned barrel in front of her bath house stood Fred Hammond. His head and one arm and the broom were thrust through the round opening over the door. At intervals he emerged cautiously with rescued articles dangling at the end of the handle. His remarks were muffled but expressive.

"Thank Heavens!" he exploded, gathering them up in a wad and holding them out toward her. "I think I've fished out the whole bunch. I'm exhausted. Now get clothed and in your right mind, and come on out here and talk to me as reward for my labors. We can compare notes about the

children or bathing by moonlight or purple flesh. They're all safe subjects, and we both know something about each one, my dear Miss Governess."

"My name," she replied through the door, "is Frances Nelson, and I'm only going to stay a little while. It will be just long enough to show you that I'm grateful to you for poking around so successfully with that broom handle. It must have been a job."

"It was a dickens of a job. I know very very few ladies I'd do it for. It will take you a darn long time to prove your real gratitude, Miss F. N.," he cried, feelingly.

She laughed. It was a merry, trilling laugh—like rippling water in a brook. Fred liked it. He told her so when she came out.

She wore a long dark cape over her silk dress, and she still had the gay handkerchief tied over her head. It was the first time he ever knew a girl could be pretty with her hair all covered up, and he remarked as much.

Miss Nelson found herself staying far later than she had intended. Moonlight always did go to her head, and besides he was very entertaining. It was much more thrilling than hearing Latin verbs.

Although she told him she wouldn't, she fully made up her mind to swim again the next evening at the same time. He knew she would. Also, as a great condescension, he promised to join the family at breakfast. And that, he vowed, would be a real test of devotion.

As he climbed into bed that night, Fred almost forgot to wonder about Corella Raymond. This little Frances Nelson was a charmer—the cutest, brightest thing he'd run up against for some time. Witty, and a peach of a shape. He wished the camping trip had been cut short sooner. This Raymond girl, so wonderfully press-agented, would have to go some to beat her, he knew. The only way she could do it would be by turning out to be the moon flower girl herself.

It was a pleasant group about the table the next morning. There sat the senior Culbertsons, the charming young widow, the two children, and their governess.

Fred, who came in last, noted how warmly brown her hair and eyes looked against her crisp yellow gingham. Already he felt repaid for his effort.

He greeted them all warmly and impartially, and opened his napkin.

"You seem surprised to see me," he observed, blandly, attacking his orange.

"We are," Marion assented. "Whatever brings you out so early?"

"We know," Genevieve spoke up, "don't we, Chris?"

Her brother, his mouth full, nodded.

"It's Miss Nelson," he added, briefly.

"Yes," artless Genevieve went on. "It's her. She was down on the beach for hours and hours last night with Uncle Fred. We sneaked down and saw them. She had on his bathrobe part of the time, and she kept saying she was purple and had goose flesh all over her, and she dressed in his room, didn't she, Chris?"

As she paused for breath her brother valiantly struck in.

"Yes, and then they sat on the beach and looked at the moon and giggled something fierce. They both said they'd break their children's necks if they acted like us."

All anguished efforts to stop them were unavailing. They babbled on and on, regardless of the enthralled ears of the hovering butler and maids, while Mrs. Baird was convulsed with laughter, their parents horrified, and the two people most involved crimson with wrath and humiliation.

Attempts at explanations only seemed to cause more of a tangle, and the simple little adventure took on the dark aspects of a scandalous intrigue.

The erstwhile happy meal broke up in gloom and bitterness. The only contented ones were Agatha Baird and the young culprits, who disappeared hand in hand.

"Of course I know," Marion admitted to her stormy-faced brother, "there wasn't anything wrong in it. But it wasn't quite fair of you to treat me that way—or Miss Nelson, either. I'm surprised at her, too. The least she could have done was not to have stayed and talked after she got dressed."

"Hang it all!" he burst out. "The girl

couldn't stand around half naked, could she? Why didn't you keep your young ones in bed where they belonged!"

Just before dinner he was informed that Miss Nelson had gone. Marion explained that they had both thought it wiser under the circumstances."

"The circumstances!" Fred echoed. "Well, if that isn't the cussedest slap! There weren't any circumstances, I tell you."

He wormed out of her the fact that Miss Nelson had gone to her home in a remote village somewhat off the beaten track about seventy-five or a hundred miles away.

He tore out of the house to the garage and climbed angrily into his high-powered roadster. The least he could do was to run on down and apologize to the girl. Poor little thing! To have to stand stuff like that from two worthless kids!

The roads, gradually bathed in light from the rising moon, took on a vaguely familiar appearance. Some other time he had been over this same stretch, of that he was sure. As finally he swung into the tree-shaded streets of the peaceful village, he suddenly knew.

He had found the town.

He was feverishly excited. Would the girl be a disappointment after all—or would she be as lovely and wonderful as he remembered her? Many things could happen since 1917. He wondered whether he really were awake!

He drove slowly up the street of his dreams. Yes, there was the blessed old stone house, porch and all, with the same wildly luxuriant mass of glorious moon flowers. To cap it all, and to make it more uncanny, there, from the dim inner recesses, appeared the girl.

With palpitating heart he stopped the car and hurried up the path toward her. She stood, as before, by the pillar, waiting, in a white net dress, crisply beruffled, her wavy hair like a soft halo about her face.

"The years have been long," he heard himself saying, breathlessly; "but I've come back for another moon flower. I told you I would."

There was a second's pregnant silence, and then, extending her hand, she said—

"I thought all along that there was something sort of familiar about you. Now I know. A mustache, more or less, does make a difference. You had one, you know, the first time."

Dazedly he took both her hands and drew her into the full light from the moon. He looked her over from head to foot.

"I am perfectly weak," he ejaculated, solemnly. "Frances Nelson, do you know I've searched this whole world over for you? Come up here and talk it over."

"So that's what you've been doing at your sister's!" she said, wickedly. "Looking for me."

"Yes," he retorted, drawing her back toward the swing he knew was there. "You've hit it exactly. I knew I was acquainted with your adorable little laugh. You look like yourself now. You didn't last night—but, oh, boy, I love you both ways. I didn't have a chance to look at you this morning when those fiends cut loose. I have hunted and hunted for you, my moon flower girl. And now that I've found you, do you know what I intend to do?"

She shook her head.

"Listen, then, and I'll tell you." He slipped an arm about her and began at the beginning.

"Your methods," she said, finally and happily, "are somewhat breath taking. Do you mean that I'm to be ready to go down

to that coffee place in less than two weeks?"

"Exactly," he replied with ardor and emphasis.

About eleven o'clock Marion Culbertson hung up the telephone receiver and sank down weakly on her husband's knee.

"It was Fred," she informed him. "He says he is engaged to Frances Nelson; that he's there now, and that he's known her for ages. He made some kind of vague remarks about moon vines and moonshine and loving me—and Heaven knows what all!"

He shouted with laughter. "After all your efforts! Well, I won't have any young brother-in-law cutting in on me any more. I can play around with the beautiful Corella all by myself."

"Oh, no, darling, you won't." She rumbled his hair and smiled sweetly. "Corella telegraphed she can't come."

Inwardly she was glad it was settled. Frances wasn't half bad, and it would be a relief not to have any more languishing widows or wide-eyed flappers running around loose. She would devote herself wholly and solely to Chris. She smiled with fixed determination at her reflection in her mirror, while several miles away, on an old porch, shielded by millions of moon flowers, a man and a girl sat through the moonlighted hours picking up the pieces and dreaming of the future.



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BY CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Brass Commandments," etc.

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The Further Adventures of Zorro

Part III

by Johnston McCulley

Author of "The Mark of Zorro," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THROUGH the connivance of a jealous Governor who wishes to punish Zorro, a benevolent highwayman (who in reality is the caballero, Don Diego Vega, with the interests of the common people at heart) that had interfered with the crooked politics of Spanish California of more than a hundred years ago, Barbados, a pirate, is given permission to attack and sack the village of Reina de Los Angeles. This he may do with the assurance of no soldier interference, for the garrison under Captain Ramón has been ordered away for the night. The loot is to be the pirate's, but Captain Ramón asks as his share that Lolita Pulido, fiancée of Zorro, be abducted and carried aboard the pirate boat. In looting the village, a sacred goblet is stolen from the church, whose priest, Fray Felipe, takes an oath that he will not reënter the edifice until he obtains the cup. Don Diego Vega (Zorro) is giving his friends a bachelor dinner when the pirates break in upon them, and in the fight that follows, slashes his mark—a "Z"—on Barbados's forehead. The pirates escape, using the only horses in town; Fray Felipe asks Zorro for aid in his quest; and at that moment a servant from the outlying home of Lolita Pulido brings word of the abduction. Alone, riding the only horse left in the village, Zorro makes a dash for the coast just in time to swim after a pirate boat; he manages to touch the hand of Lolita as she dejectedly cowers in the stern, assures her of his presence, and whilst the outlaws store their booty, Zorro hides himself aboard their ship.

Hidden in a storeroom, Zorro discovers that Lolita is separated from him by only a thin partition; he reassures her that he will protect her. In the darkness he goes above, and on deck tricks the pirates into believing that the ship is haunted; Barbados, who alone disbelieves, grows fearful when he learns that the sacred goblet is aboard. With the coming of morning Zorro is discovered, and after a mad chase over the decks and through the rigging, is captured. As he is forced to the plank, with a bar of iron lashed to his wrists, he is permitted to give Lolita a farewell kiss—with the assurance that "another will kiss her soon." Meanwhile, fast overhauling them, is a second ship that bears on its topsail the Mark of Zorro.

CHAPTER XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

UPON the frantic departure of Don Diego Vega from Reina de Los Angeles, Don Audre Ruiz took command of the situation and the caballeros simultaneously. There was none willing to dispute his leadership. Don Audre always

had been a leader when there was an enterprise that called for hard riding and hard fighting in the bright face of danger.

Captain Ramón was not to be found, and Sergeant Gonzales had ridden away with the soldiers. So Don Audre noised it abroad that he and his friends intended pursuing the pirates as speedily as possible, and made a quick search for mounts.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 6.

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They acquired enough, presently, but the horses were a sorry lot when compared to the *caballeros's* own, which the pirates had stolen. And without changing their attire, retaining the splendid costumes they had been wearing at Don Diego's bachelor feast and with their jeweled swords at their sides, they rode up the slope and took the trail that would carry them to the sea.

Don Audre decided against following the pirates' tracks. He knew that they would reach the coast long before the *caballeros*, and would embark. Don Diego would do what he could, which would be little. And Don Audre realized that their only hope was to get to the trading schooner, put out in it, and make an attempt to overtake Barbados and his evil crew.

They rode with what speed they could, shouting at their poor mounts and at one another, along the slopes, down the dusty trails and so toward the distant sea. They crossed the trail of the pirates who had looted the Pulido *hacienda*, but ignored it. Don Audre Ruiz knew where the trading schooner would be anchored, some miles to the south of where the pirate ship undoubtedly had touched, and that place was his objective.

Hour after hour they rode, urging their jaded horses to their utmost, glad that the moon was bright and that they could make as good progress as in the day. And, when they finally were within a couple of miles of the sea, and also an hour of the dawn, Don Audre suddenly raised his hand and reined in his horse, and those behind stopped with him. A native was standing in the middle of the trail.

Don Audre approached him slowly, hand on the hilt of his dagger. There were some natives who were not to be trusted. But when he drew near he recognized the fellow as one who had worked at his father's *hacienda*.

"What do you here?" Don Audre demanded.

"I saw the *señor* coming from the distance with his friends," the native answered. "I have news."

"Speak!"

"I was coming across the hills, *señor*, and saw the pirates."

"Ha! Talk quickly!" Audre Ruiz commanded.

"I went into hiding, lest they slay me. They had good horses and much loot, also a girl—"

"Tell us of that!"

"It was the *señorita* Don Diego Vega expects to wed," the native said. "They took her with them to the shore, and presently more pirates came from Reina de Los Angeles. They went aboard their ship, taking the *señorita* and the loot with them."

"What else?"

"There was a man appeared, *señor*, and killed one of the pirates. I got a glimpse of him, Don Audre, and it was Señor Zorro, the one that—"

"Ha! Zorro!" Audre shrieked. "Speak quickly!"

"He ran from them, and they gave up the pursuit. But when the boats started from the land, he dived into the sea and swam after them. And he did not return!"

"Then is he aboard the pirate craft!" Don Audre declared.

"The pirate ship sailed to the south, *señor*."

"Good!" Audre cried. "Know you anything of the trading schooner?"

"Sí, *señor*! She is anchored straight ahead, and the men expect to start for Reina de Los Angeles in the morning to trade."

"They will not, though they do not know it," Don Audre said. "Here is gold for you, fellow. Ha! So the pirate ship sailed to the south. That means that the rogues are going to their hidden rendezvous somewhere down the coast. We'll get the trading schooner and pursue! Forward!"

But, as they would have started, Don Audre Ruiz raised a hand and stopped them again. From the rear had come the beating of a horse's hoofs. Don Audre motioned to the *caballeros*, and they scattered to either side of the road and prepared to receive the newcomer.

Nearer grew the beating of hoofs, and a horseman appeared, riding frantically through the moonlight down the slope and toward them. When he saw them, he

reined up, and stopped in their midst in a shower of gravel and sand and dust. The reckless rider was Sergeant Gonzales.

"Ha, señores!" he called. "I have overtaken you finally, it appears."

"And to what end?" Don Audre Ruiz asked, urging his horse forward and glaring at the soldier. "You have news?"

"Not so, señor! I come in search of it. I returned to Reina de Los Angeles with my troopers to learn of the pirates and what they had done. I learned, also, of your departure, so left my men and rode after you. Captain Ramón was not at the *presidio*. As the next soldier of rank—"

"It is in our minds to get the trading schooner and give pursuit," Ruiz told him.

"That is a worthy idea!" Sergeant Gonzales declared. "Too long have these bloody pirates infested our shores. Meal mush and goat's milk! Let us go forward!"

"Are you seeking to take command of this expedition?" Don Audre Ruiz demanded, hotly. "This is a private rescue party of *caballeros*, I would have you know, and not a detachment of the Governor's men! We have small love for the Governor!"

"Though I wear his uniform, I say the same thing," Sergeant Gonzales declared.

"But I am after pirates! I care not who commands, so that I get a chance at a pirate with my trusty blade! Ha! When I meet a pirate face to face—"

"Spare us your boasting!" Don Audre said.

"Boasting?" shrieked the sergeant. "Boasting? Perchance you would like to cross blades with me in answer to that insult?"

"You are safe in making the challenge, knowing that I would not stoop to do so," Don Audre said.

"And you are safe in refusing, having the ability to hide behind your gentle blood!" the sergeant returned.

"Señor—"

Sergeant Gonzales urged his mount closer to that of Don Audre, but the expression in the sergeant's face had changed peculiarly, and his countenance did not show rage.

"Señor, it is true," Sergeant Gonzales observed, "that I am but a poor soldier

without blue blood in my veins. My father was a butcher and my mother's father raised swine. But Don Diego Vega has been good enough to term himself my friend. And now that he is in peril, I ride with his other friends to his rescue, and the rescue of his lady! I trust the *señor* will not misunderstand! I do not seek to equal my betters. If I am not good enough to ride with you, *caballero*, then I ride by myself! But I ride!"

Don Audre Ruiz bent forward and searched the sergeant's face by the light of the one torch the company had burning. Then he extended his hand.

"Sergeant Gonzales, it is for me to ask your pardon," Don Audre said, grandly. "I would not be worthy the blood in my veins did I do less. Any friend of Don Diego Vega is welcome on this expedition. But, have you leave of absence?"

"Ha! I took it!" Sergeant Gonzales roared, grinning broadly. "Captain Ramón was not at the *presidio*. Being the next in rank, I ordered myself to set out on the trail and get a full report of the occurrence. When I am able to make that report I return."

"Ride you with us!" Don Audre said. "Thus we have the sanction of the soldiery and official approval of our deeds."

"I shall approve anything that has to do with causing the death of pirates!" Sergeant Gonzales declared.

The moon disappeared entirely, and the night was dark. They rode forward slowly now, careful not to get off the trail, but they did not have much farther to go. Soon they came to the crest of a hill, and below them they heard the hissing sea, and saw the lights of a ship riding at anchor a short distance from the shore.

Down to the surf they urged their mounts. And there they met with another surprise. For a horseman was awaiting them there in the darkness. Don Audre Ruiz gasped in astonishment when he recognized old Fray Felipe.

"We left you in the town, *fray*!" he said. "And how is it that we now find you here? Is this some sort of a miracle?"

"I departed the town while you were

yet searching for horses," Fray Felipe explained. "I got a mount for myself and came ahead, because I cannot ride like the wind, as do you young *caballeros*. It was in my mind that you would make for the trading schooner. I heard you say as much."

"But why have you come?" Don Audre wanted to know.

"I have known Don Diego Vega and the little *señorita* since they were babes in arms, and I was to have married them to-day," the old *fray* replied.

"But fighting is not your forte!" Don Audre declared. "You are old, and you wear a gown. Do you remain behind and pray for our success, and let us wield the blades! That were better, *fray*."

"I am willing to make my prayers. But I have taken a vow," Fray Felipe replied. "I must return the golden goblet the pirates stole from the church."

"Then you would go with us?" Don Audre asked.

"*Si!* I already have communicated with the captain of the trading schooner, *señor*. He is coming ashore now in one of his boats. Thus time will be saved."

CHAPTER XIII.

TRAGEDY AT A DISTANCE.

THE *caballeros* dismounted stiffly and gathered near the water line. In from the distant trading schooner a boat was coming, driven over the choppy water by silent oarsmen. Half a dozen men were in her, and their flaring torches touched the sea with streaks of flame. They approached the shore carefully, and on guard, as though fearing some trap set by thieves, and by the light of the torches those on the land could see that the men in the boat were heavily armed.

Don Audre Ruiz and Fray Felipe went forward and met the boat at the water's edge and greeted the schooner's captain as he stepped to land. He was a regular trader who carried goods overland from the sea to Reina de Los Angeles every now and then. He traveled as far as San Diego de Alcalá to the south, and as far as San Fran-

cisco de Asis to the north—a bold fellow and honest, well and favorably known.

"What is all this tumult?" the captain demanded. "Fray Felipe, are you not? Ha! I thought that I recognized you, good *fray*! And Don Audre Ruiz, whose father has purchased much goods of me. Sundry *caballeros* and men of rank, also! In what way may I be of service to you, *señores*? Have you ridden out all this long way in the night to have first choice of my stock of goods?"

Don Audre Ruiz told him swiftly. "We want your ship, to pursue a pirate craft!" he said.

"How is this, *señor*?" the captain cried. "There are pirates in these waters?"

"*Si!* And possibly within half a dozen miles of you," Don Audre told him. "Early in the night they raided Reina de Los Angeles. They also raided the Pulido *hacienda*, and carried away the *señorita*, who was to have wed Don Diego Vega this day."

"By the saints!" the schooner's captain swore. "They stole the bride-to-be of Señor Zorro? Is he here with you?"

"He followed them, going ahead of us, and possibly managed to get aboard their ship," Don Audre explained. "The pirate craft has sailed by this time. They went toward the south. They will beat out to sea for a distance. If we can start soon it may be possible to overhaul them."

"How many rascals in the pirate crew?" the captain of the schooner asked.

"Not more than threescore, as nearly as we can judge," Don Audre replied. "And here are a score of *caballeros*, and we are ready to fight!"

The captain of the schooner drew a deep breath, held it for an instant, and then expelled it with great force. And during this process he evidently made up his mind concerning the matter.

"*Señores*, I am yours to command!" he said. "My ship is yours, and her crew. If I can do anything to help rid the seas of such vermin, I am more than willing. My schooner is a swift vessel in light winds such as we find now. I'll signal the other boats and have you aboard as soon as is possible."

"You will not fail to profit by it," Don Audre Ruiz told him.

"I am not doing it with the expectation of profit," the captain declared. "I detest thieves, and I admire honest men! I have many friends in Reina de Los Angeles, some of whom probably have suffered at the hands of these pirates. And, above all, I did admire the exploits of this Señor Zorro, as Don Diego was called. It will be a pleasure, *señores*, to aid you in this."

He called to his men, and they signaled to the ship with their torches. Out of the darkness and across the tumbling sea came more boats from the schooner. The *caballeros* turned their horses adrift, knowing that they would be picked up and returned, made certain that they had daggers and swords handy, and got quickly into the boats and put out to the ship.

Sergeant Gonzales and Fray Felipe, by accident, were placed in the same craft, sitting side by side on one of the wide thwarts. Sergeant Gonzales observed the *fray* carefully from the corners of his eyes. The sergeant wished to talk, having kept silent for some minutes, and the *fray* was the nearest man he knew.

"Never did I think to join hands with you in an enterprise, *fray!*" the sergeant said, puffing out his cheeks. "If I am not badly mistaken, you are the gowned one who stopped me in the plaza on a certain occasion, and made remarks about soldiers drinking too much wine at the *posada*. Ha! But pirates' raids cause rescue parties, and rescue parties cause strange comrades!"

"I am appreciating the fact," Fray Felipe replied quietly and with a smile.

"So they stole your sacred goblet, did they?" Sergeant Gonzales said smoothly. "*Fray*, when I have rescued the *señorita*, aided Don Diego to escape, and annihilated the pirates with my blade, then will I regain your goblet for you! Steal church goblets and brides, eh? Ha! Meal mush and goat's milk!"

"If your sword arm is half as strong as your tongue, *señor*," Fray Felipe rebuked him gently, "then the pirates are as good as dead already!"

Sergeant Gonzales whirled upon him.

"Ha! Stinging words from a gentle

fray!" he gasped. "Is it possible for me to get insulted where and when I can wipe out the insult with a thrust? A *caballero* insults me and then refuses to fight because of the noble blood in his veins and the poor swill in mine! A *fray* insults me—and I cannot fight a man who wears a gown! Meal mush and goat's milk! But wait until we meet up with these pirates! Let a pirate but insult me, and—ha! My blade shall be bathed in blood!"

Sergeant Gonzales turned away abruptly to nurse his wrath, and Fray Felipe smiled and his eyes twinkled. He waited a moment, then touched the sergeant on the shoulder.

"Soldiers and *frailes* alike are needed in the world," Fray Felipe said. "There are times when a hardy soldier should be gentle—and even there are times when a *fray* should fight. Let us be friends!"

"*Fray*," Sergeant Gonzales declared, "you are a noble fellow, after all! I forgive you for what you said about drinking wine. When the muss commences, *fray*, get you behind me. My sword shall shield you, *fray!*"

"I thank you," Fray Felipe said. "And I shall shield you in turn with my prayers."

"Prayers may have power," Sergeant Gonzales told him, "but when it comes to fighting pirates give me my trusty blade! *Fray*, a pirate has not sense enough to know when a prayer is directed against him!"

Soon they came alongside the schooner and mounted to the deck by the light of torches. The boats were swung aboard, and the captain and Don Audre Ruiz held a long conference. Then there came a volley of orders, the anchor came up and the sails filled, and the schooner crept off the shore and away from the land through the black night.

Straight out to sea they went, gathering headway, and in time a faint streak of light showed across the land and the dawn came. *Caballeros* and crew strained their eyes and swept the sea in every direction. And finally the sharp eyes of one of the men aloft discovered a sail.

The course of the trading schooner was changed, and the chase began. Nearer

their quarry they crept as the sun came up and bathed the sea and the land, glistening through the haze. Glasses were leveled at the distant craft.

"She is the pirate!" the schooner's captain declared. "Her flag of iniquity flies from her mast!"

He bellowed another volley of orders to his crew, and they crowded on all sail. They rushed about the schooner, preparing her for the battle. The eager *caballeros* looked to their blades, the crew to their cutlasses.

"If Zorro is aboard that craft he should know that his friends are near at hand for the rescue," Don Audre said.

And then it was that they got out a sail and painted a gigantic Z upon it, and sent it aloft. It was their banner of battle, a flag of war that betokened their allegiance to a man and a cause.

"Courage and swift work does it!" the schooner's captain told Don Audre. "We are greatly outnumbered. But my crew has had dealings with pirates before, hence each man will fight with the strength of five. And you and your friends, Don Audre, have good reason for fighting like fiends."

"We are prepared to do it," Don Audre replied. "Think you that we can overhaul the pirate?"

"It is but a question of time," the captain declared. "The pirate sails prettily, but her bottom is foul. I can tell that much at this distance. Pirates are too lazy to keep a ship in perfect shape. And this little schooner of mine is a swift craft and in prime condition."

They gained steadily, and meanwhile they watched the distant pirate ship continually. They saw that there was some sort of a tumult on board. Don Audre Ruiz, standing at the rail near the bow, with a glass glued to his eye, watched carefully.

"It is probable that Señor Zorro is fighting the entire pirate company," he announced. "I can see men running about the rigging. Let us pray that we may be in time."

Sergeant Gonzales, standing near him, uttered an oath that the presence of Fray Felipe did not keep back.

"Meal mush and goat's milk!" he exclaimed. "Let us crowd on more sail and have at these pirates!" He swept his blade from its scabbard. "That for a pirate!" he shrieked, thrusting about him in a rage. "This for a pirate! Ha!"

"Save your breath and your strength," Don Audre advised him. "You may have need of them both soon."

"Did you hear that, *fray*?" Sergeant Gonzales demanded, whirling upon old Felipe. "More insults, and I cannot avenge them! A *caballero* insults me and will not fight, and I cannot fight a *fray*! By the time we clash with these pirates I shall be in a fine rage, and work it off on their worthless bodies. Ha!"

Don Audre Ruiz gave a gasp and called some of the *caballeros* to his side.

"Look!" he directed. "They are making some poor devil walk the plank! By the saints, 'tis Zorro!"

"Zorro!" the others cried.

"Look! And the little *señorita* is standing at the rail, forced to watch!"

There was a moment of horrified silence. The face of Don Audre Ruiz was white as he contemplated the fate of his friend. The *caballeros* said not a word, but those who had glasses watched, and the others strained their eyes in an effort to see.

And then Don Audre Ruiz gave a low cry of horror and turned quickly away, as though he could endure the sight no longer.

What he had seen had been enough. There were traces of tears in his eyes, and his voice choked.

"He is gone!" Don Audre said. "Don Diego, my friend! We can only avenge him now!"

"Gone!" Sergeant Gonzales cried, sudden tears in his eyes, too. He brushed them away roughly and blinked. "Don Diego gone? Then, by the saints, will my blade be thrust as it never has been thrust before! Now, by the saints—"

His vow ended in a choke of emotion, and he turned quickly away. Don Audre, his eyes stinging, his lips set in a thin, straight line, turned to Fray Felipe.

"Say your prayers for him," he directed. "And pray, also, that we will know

how to avenge him when we come alongside! *Dios!* Give strength to my arm!"

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

SMILING in the face of death, Señor Zorro yet battled to keep from showing his genuine emotions, because of the presence of the *señorita*. But in that awful moment when he stood upon the plank, looking first at the evil faces of Barbados and Sanchez, and then at the agonized countenance of Señorita Lolita Pulido, he knew what torture meant.

It was not that Señor Zorro was afraid of death in itself—a thing that must come to every human being in the end. But his agony came from a knowledge of what he would leave behind when he took the plunge into the sea.

The woman he had hoped to make his bride, his friends, his father, his estate—he was leaving them all for the Great Unknown. And he was young, and had not lived his fill of life. Besides, he was leaving the *señorita* in grave danger. He could only hope that his friends in the vessel behind would be able to be of service to her, and that they would know how to avenge him.

Barbados gave his last mocking laugh, and Señor Zorro felt the plank tipping. He felt himself losing his balance. The heavy weight on his wrists was almost bending him backward. He knew how swiftly it would carry him down into the depths of the sea. Then would come a brief and useless struggle, he supposed, a moment of horror—and the end!

His eyes met those of the *señorita* yet again. And then it seemed that everything gave way beneath him and he shot downward.

There came a splash of water as he struck the surface—he felt its sudden chill—and then the waves closed over his head. He was a famous swimmer, but no man can swim with a heavy bar of metal tied to his wrists, and those wrists lashed behind his back.

Mechanically Señor Zorro protected

himself as he struck the water, as though for a deep dive. He drew air into his lungs until it seemed that they would burst. He kicked in vain against the down-pulling power of the heavy weight. Down and down he went into the depths until the light from the surface faded and he found himself in darkness.

Señor Zorro prayed and worked at the same instant. He jerked his wrists from side to side behind his back, trying to force them apart. He expelled a tiny bit of air now and then as he descended, but retained it as much as possible.

Often he had played at remaining as long as possible beneath water, but it is one thing to do so when a man has the knowledge that he can spring to the surface at any time, and quite another when he has reason to believe that he never will reach the surface again at all.

Yet he continued to struggle as he shot downward. Red flashes were before his eyes now, and a multitude of faces and scenes seemed to flit before him.

In that awful instant he relived half his life.

"*Dios!*" he thought. "If this be death—"

Another tug he gave at his wrists. The man who had lashed the heavy weight there had not done his work well. Perhaps he was too busy watching Barbados and fearing him. Perhaps he had held a sneaking admiration for this Señor Zorro, who had offered battle to an entire ship's company. However, the rope that held the weight gave a trifle.

Señor Zorro, in his agony, realized that. He tugged again, and then pressed his palms close together and drew in his wrists as much as possible. The heavy weight, dragging downward, pulled the loose loop over the wrists and hands. Zorro felt an immediate relief. He realized what had happened. And then he began his battle to reach the surface. The weight was gone, but his wrists were still lashed together behind his back.

He kicked and struggled and shot upward. He expelled more of the precious air his lungs retained. His chest was burning, his ears were ringing, he was almost un-

conscious because of the pressure of the water he had been forced to endure.

He saw a glimmer of light, but knew that the surface was yet far away. And it occurred to him that even the surface did not mean life. For his wrists were yet bound behind him, and he was miles from the shore.

On he went, up and up, struggling and fighting. He jerked at his wrists until they were raw and bleeding, but to no avail. Those who had lashed his wrists had done better than the one who had fastened the weight to them.

And finally he gave a last struggle, a last kick, and felt the blessed air striking upon his face.

He fought to get into the proper position for resting as much as he could. He kept afloat, and he drew in great gasps of air, and finally reduced his breathing to normal. And then, as he rose on the crest of a wave, he looked around as well as he could.

The pirate ship was some distance away, sailing slowly before a gentle breeze. Señor Zorro found himself floating in her wake. He could see men rushing around her deck and up into her rigging, but at the distance could not guess their tasks.

The wave dropped him and lifted him again, spinning him halfway around. Señor Zorro gasped at the risk of swallowing a portion of salt water. Bearing down upon him was the other craft, the one with the gigantic Z up on the sail. Zorro saw that he was directly in her path.

Not much hope burned in his breast, yet the spirit of combat still lived. He would not give up so long as there was the slightest chance. He would fight—fight—until, exhausted, he sank for the last time toward the bottom of the sea.

Those on the approaching ship did not see him, for they were watching the pirate craft and preparing for the battle that was to come.

He hailed those on board, but his voice was drowned by the roar of the water against the schooner's bows. He saw that she would strike him, and kicked frantically to work himself to one side of the track she was following. Another glance ahead

at the pirate craft convinced him that the schooner would not change her course.

Once more he tugged at his bonds, to no avail. He felt himself drawn in toward the schooner's bows, and fought against the pull of the water helplessly. He was picked up, hurled forward, whirled around. Had he saved himself from the depths, he wondered, to be crushed senseless by the bow of the craft that carried his friends? Then she was upon him. He rose with the crest of a wave and was hurled at the bow.

He saw an anchor chain that was loosely looped and a dragging line. If he could but catch one of those and make his way to the deck, there might be some chance. Once more the sea whirled him and cast him forward. He came against the swinging loop of anchor chain with a crash, grasped it, was lifted and dropped, but held on!

For a moment he rested, panting, realizing how precarious was his position. He threw one leg around the swinging chain. How to reach the bowsprit he could not fathom. Those above would pay no attention to him, and could not hear him if he hailed. And to climb that swinging loop of chain would be a task for an athlete with his hands unbound.

The bow of the ship dipped, and Señor Zorro felt himself soused beneath the water for an instant. He gripped the chain with his hands and his leg and fought to maintain his position. His arms were aching, and the chain had cut through his clothing already and was chafing at his leg. Once more the bow dipped, and Zorro slipped a few feet along the chain, unable to stop his descent.

He gripped with his leg again. His hands came to a stop, and he realized that the rope that bound them had found an obstruction. Zorro worked slowly and carefully with his fingers, even as he held on. One of the links of the chain, he found, was imperfect, had cracked, and presented on one side a jagged edge.

Hope sang in his breast once more. But he knew that he would have to work carefully. He did not dare release his hold entirely, for a sudden dip of the bow and the quick wash of the water would be

enough to sweep him from the chain. But he sawed back and forth as well as he could, pulling the rope across the rough edge of the chain link.

He glanced ahead. The ships were not far apart now, and the schooner swung a bit to starboard, so as to bear down upon the pirate craft from a more advantageous angle. Zorro worked frantically, and after a time he felt the rope give. His wrists were raw and paining. His leg was bleeding already. There were pains in his head, and his vision was imperfect, but hope sang within him once more.

He sawed and sawed, and once more he glanced ahead. It would not be long now before the ships clashed. He wanted to be up on the deck, normal breath in his nostrils and the sword of Zorro in his hand, to aid his friends, to fight his way to the deck of the pirate craft and to the *señorita's* side.

The rope gave again. Señor Zorro was forced to rest for a moment, leaning back on the chain. A wave swept him to one side, and he thought for an instant that he was gone. But he regained his balance and continued his sawing.

And presently he knew that he was free. The rope dangled from one wrist only. He gave an exclamation of delight and thanks, gripped the chain, and turned over. He regarded his bleeding wrists, hesitated a moment, gathered breath and courage, and commenced the perilous ascent of the chain.

It was a painful and difficult task. Señor Zorro set his teeth into his lower lip and struggled upward foot by foot. The swinging chain, slippery, from the sea, threatened to pitch him back into the water. Every few feet he was obliged to stop, to gasp for breath and close his eyes for a moment because the pain in his wrists and leg made him weak with nausea.

He came within a short distance of the vessel, slipped back, and forced his way upward again. And finally he grasped with one hand the chain port and held on. His hope had increased now. Nothing would make him loose his hold, he told himself.

A moment he rested, then forced his way upward again. The schooner was very

close to the pirate ship now. On the deck above him Señor Zorro could hear Don Audre Ruiz shrieking instructions to the *caballeros* and the captain shouting to his crew.

He managed to get up to the butt of the bowsprit, and there, safe from the sea, he rested for a moment again. The two ships would crash together in a minute or so, he saw. He raised his head weakly, and took a deep breath, and then struggled to his feet, ready to spring down to the deck.

His hand went down to whip the sword of Zorro from its scabbard. The schooner yawed suddenly as her helmsman fought to get a position of advantage. The big jib swung back, whipped by the angry wind.

Señor Zorro was looking down at the deck, and he did not see his danger. Don Audre Ruiz turned at the instant, shrieked, and rubbed his eyes.

"Zorro!" he cried.

He was seen from the deck of the pirate craft, too.

Barbados and Sanchez caught sight of him. Sanchez crossed himself quickly, and the face of Barbados turned white.

And then the jib cracked against Señor Zorro's body, knocked him from his precarious perch, and hurled him once more into the sea!

CHAPTER XV.

A SHOW OF GRATITUDE.

THE schooner sailed on, and came against the pirate ship with a crash.

But here was a battle unlike the usual one when honest men met pirates. As a usual thing, the pirates could be expected to board and slay without mercy, to loot, and then either to destroy the ill-fated vessel or take it away a prize. And the honest men could be expected only to offer what defense they could. But here was a case where the honest men were more than willing to carry the fight to the pirates. For Don Audre Ruiz and his *caballero* friends had seen Señor Zorro walk the plank, and also they fought to rescue a lady.

But both forces found themselves disconcerted at the outset. Don Audre Ruiz, glancing toward the bow of the schooner, was sure that he saw Señor Zorro standing there against a background of sky and water, his figure dripping. He rubbed his eyes and looked again—and Señor Zorro was gone!

"'Tis the spirit of Zorro come to aid us!" Don Audre cried. "I saw him for a moment, waving his hand at me and reaching for his blade! The spirit of Zorro fights with us!"

The *caballeros* were not certain what he meant, but they cheered his words and rushed toward the rail, their gleaming blades ready to be dyed a crimson. Fray Felipe knelt beside the mast in prayer. But Sergeant Gonzales, standing with his feet wide apart and his sword in his hand, stared foolishly toward the bow and gasped his astonishment and fear.

"I saw him!" the sergeant shrieked. "I saw Don Diego, my friend! By the saints—"

The ships crashed together. But the pirates did not rush as was their custom. For fear had clutched at their superstitious natures, even as it had clutched at Barbados and Sanchez, his evil lieutenant. Sanchez had shrieked the news, but Barbados did not heed his intelligence. Barbados himself had seen Señor Zorro standing against the sky. And how may a man do that when he has been sent to the bottom of the sea with a heavy weight fastened to him?

"Fiends of hell!" Barbados screeched. "This Zorro must be a demon!"

"We cannot fight against ghosts!" Sanchez cried. "We are lost before we commence."

Barbados seemed to come to himself and shake off his terror in part. He instantly was eager to win free from the trading schooner. He did not fear the *caballeros*, who were greatly outnumbered now, but he did fear the supernatural. He forgot the chance for murder and loot, and wanted only to get away.

Barbados shrieked his commands, and the half-stupefied pirates ran to execute them. The pirate craft swung away from

the schooner, so that men could not spring from one ship to the other. There were less than half a dozen clashes of blades; less than half a dozen minor wounds.

Slowly the pirate craft fell away. The helmsman of the schooner worked frantically to bring his ship back into the wind. The *caballeros* and the members of the schooner's crew waited, eager for the two ships to come together again, that they might engage the pirates and fight to victory.

Barbados howled more commands. From the pirate ship came a rain of fire balls, and flaming torches were hurled. It was a favorite pirate trick, and the men knew what their commander wanted. Clouds of pungent smoke rolled across the deck of the schooner.

The *caballeros* gasped and fought to get to the clean, pure air. Their nostrils and throats were raw, their eyes stinging.

Through the dense smoke they could see little. The pirate ship gradually was lengthening the distance between her and the trading schooner. The pirates' work had been done.

For the sails of the schooner were wrapped in flames, and bits of them fell, burning, to the deck below. Flames licked at the tarred rigging and spread out on the spars.

"She's making away!" Don Audre Ruiz cried. "She's running from us!"

There seemed to be no question about it now. The pirates were hurrying away without giving battle. And the raging *caballeros* wanted battle, and they remembered that the *señorita* was yet on the pirate craft.

The captain was howling to his crew, and the men were fighting the raging flames. The *caballeros*, forgetting their silks and satins and plumes, ran to help. Here was a foe more formidable than pirates of the open sea.

The schooner drifted with the water and the wind in the wake of the pirate ship. The smoke drifted away, and finally the fire was extinguished. Quick inventory was taken of the damage.

It did not amount to so very much, since the rigging had not been burned to a great

extent. But the sails were gone, for the greater part, and pursuit for the moment at an end.

Again the captain shouted his commands, and as his men hurried to carry them out he turned to Don Audre.

"I have other sails, *señor*," he explained. "They will be in place as rapidly as my men can get them there. The craft of ill-omen cannot get far before we are upon her heels again. She is running out to sea once more. She would lose sight of us before she turns toward the accursed spot where they have their land rendezvous. Their behavior astounds me; they acted as if they had seen a ghost!"

"And so did I!" Don Audre declared. "I'll swear that, for an instant, I saw Señor Zorro standing at the butt of the bowsprit—and then he was gone!"

"By the saints, I saw him myself!" Sergeant Gonzales shouted. "He was here to aid us! Man or spirit, I know not—but he was here! And now he has disappeared!"

Fray Felipe came toward them. "It cannot be that he is alive and aboard," he told them, "else he would discover himself to us at once. Perhaps it was but a strong hope that caused you to imagine the sight."

"Fray, I swore friendship with you, but I'll break the compact if you say such a thing again!" Sergeant Gonzales declared. "I saw him, I say! Man or spirit, I know not—but I saw him!"

The *caballeros* were busy helping the crew with the new sails. One by one they were sheeted home, and presently the schooner gathered headway once more. On it sailed, in the wake of the pirate craft, vengeance only delayed.

Far behind, Señor Zorro watched her grow smaller and smaller, and the flare of hope that had been in his heart dwindled to a mere spark again.

His unexpected plunge into the sea before he had recovered from the first ordeal had unnerved him for the moment. He had come to the surface to find that the schooner had drifted away. Before he could handle himself to advantage she was at some distance, and the pirate craft was drawing away from the ship of smoke and flame.

There was a strong tide running, and Señor Zorro was too weak to fight against it. Near him there drifted a spar that had been torn away when the ships had crashed together. He struggled through the swirling water and managed to reach it, and drew himself upon it to sprawl there almost breathless, gasping, exhausted. He was too weak to signal his friends, and he doubted whether they would see him did he do so.

Shouting would be a waste of breath, he knew; and so, stretched across the spar, he fought to keep his consciousness, closing his eyes and forcing himself to breathe normally. When some strength had returned to him he sat upright and looked across the sea. The pirate craft was in the distance. The schooner, the fires extinguished, some of her sails in place, was drawing away from him rapidly. Señor Zorro gave thanks for that—his friends were not deserting the *señorita*.

He began to take stock of his predicament. Far away he could see a dirty streak on the horizon, and he knew it for the land he would have to reach.

He was in sore condition for the hazardous journey. His wrists were raw and bleeding; his leg pained him. He scarcely could see because of the glare of the sun on the water. Thirst tortured him; hunger added to the torture.

Señor Zorro sat up on the spar and smiled a sorry smile. He made sure that his blade still remained at his side.

"Sword of Zorro, we are in a sorry state!" he declared. "This is an emergency such as never have we faced before. But we must win through!"

A moment he hesitated, and then, as though to give courage to himself he raised his voice again, this time in his song:

Atención! A caballero's near—

But his voice broke, and he told himself that he was a fool to attempt to sing out there in the wild waste of waters, clinging to a spar. Far better to concern himself about getting to the land.

Señor Zorro rested a short time longer, watching the disappearing ships. And turning, he looked at the distant land.

"Sword of Zorro, we travel toward the east!" he announced. "If ever I touch dry land again, there I remain for some time to come. This seafaring is a sorry business!"

But he said that merely to amuse himself, of course. He would fare forth to sea again at any time to rescue the Señorita Lolita, and well he knew it. He only hoped that Don Audre Ruiz and the others would be of service to her.

He adjusted himself as well as he could, and started to swim, clinging to the spar. That rendered his progress slow, but he did not dare cast it aside, for he knew that he never would reach the distant land. For a time he swam, and then he floated on the spar and rested, and then urged himself to swim again. On and on through the hours, while the sun traveled across the heavens, he forced the spar through the water.

It seemed to him that he was nearing the land, but he could not be sure. There might be a treacherous current in these waters, against which he was expending his strength in vain. But he did not stop.

His mind was a maelstrom, his muscles acted mechanically. Now and then pains shot up his legs and along his back, and often he swam for minutes at a time with his eyes closed. He watched the sun begin its descent toward the sea, and yet he swam.

At times songs rang through his brain, at other times he caught himself mouthing meaningless phrases. And then he thought of the Señorita Lolita, and swam on.

Twilight came. The sun disappeared. There was a period of darkness, and then the surface of the sea was touched with the glory of the moon. Señor Zorro could not see the land now, but he knew in which direction it lay, and swam on, a few minutes at a time.

And thus passed the night. But before the dark space just before the dawn, Señor Zorro was laughing raucously, out of his wits. Some god of good fortune kept him swimming in the proper direction. And when the sun appeared again, it brought a new agony to his eyes, new tortures of thirst. He swallowed salt water and spat it out, and found that it had made him ill.

For a time he was stretched across the spar, weak, sick, on the verge of delirium.

He fancied that a myriad of pirate vessels were about him, bearing down upon him. He saw the pretty, laughing face of the Señorita Lolita in the mist that hung above the sea. He laughed back at her, and once again his cracked voice rose in a song:

Atención! A caballero's near—

He felt himself grow suddenly weak. It seemed to him that the land was near at last, but he could not be sure. He drew himself upon the spar, sprawling across it.

"Must—rest—" Señor Zorro gasped.

And with the gasp he passed into unconsciousness.

Back to earth he struggled as through a land of hideous dreams. He tossed and groaned and tried to open his eyes, but felt that he could not. There seemed to be a roaring in his ears that was not of the sea. And finally it came to him that it was a human voice, attempting to beat through his unconsciousness and bring him to an understanding of things.

"Señor! Señor—" the voice said.

Señor Zorro struggled yet again, groaned once more, and opened his eyes. But not into the burning glare of the open sea! He was in cool shade, he found, and from a distance came the hissing of the surf. He blinked his eyes rapidly, felt something at his lips, and drank deeply of pure, cold water.

"Señor!" There was the voice again. "For the love of the saints, señor, come back to life!"

Full consciousness returned to him in a breath. He opened his eyes wider and struggled to sit up. Then he saw that he was in some sort of a poor hut, and that a native was beside him, with an arm beneath his shoulders.

"Ha!" Señor Zorro gasped.

"Thank the saints, señor!" the native cried.

Señor Zorro, with the help of the native, sat up. He had been stretched on a sort of couch, he found. He glanced around the interior of the poor hut, through the open door at the sparkling sea.

"What—" he began.

"I found you yesterday, *señor*, far out to sea, riding on a piece of wreckage," the native said. "You had lost your wits. You fought me when I tried to take you into my boat, and tried to draw blade against me. Then you went unconscious, and I had my way with you."

"And—and then?" Señor Zorro gasped.

"Why, *señor*, I fetched you here!" the native explained. "And throughout the night you raved, and so far to-day. The sun has but two more hours to live."

"More water!" Zorro commanded.

The native gave it him. He drank deeply, stood up, walked to the door and looked out. There was no other habitation as far as he could see.

"Where is this?" Zorro asked.

"On the coast, *señor*, far to the south of Reina de Los Angeles. I am but a poor neophyte who eats what fish he can catch. Once I worked on a *hacienda*, *señor*, but the governor took all for taxes."

"I know," Señor Zorro told him.

"And so I got me a boat and came down the coast and built this poor house. And here I live alone and am happy. There are times when I carry fish to the stronghold of the pirates, and trade them for some other things—"

"Ha!" Zorro cried. "The stronghold of the pirates? Where is that?"

"Less than ten miles down the coast, *señor*, in a little bay. There are huts, and women and children, and every now and then the pirate ship puts in after a raid. They are safe there, *señor*, though they are within eight miles of the *presidio* of San Diego de Alcalá."

"By the saints!" Zorro swore. "And how does it come that you did not rob me of my sword and the few things of value upon me, and toss me into the sea?"

The native looked at him frankly. "Pardon, *señor*," he said, "but I never would do such a thing as that. For I knew you instantly, *señor*. You are Señor Zorro, who rode up and down El Camino Real and avenged the wrongs of the natives and *frailes*. You once punished a soldier who beat my father. If it is necessary, *señor*, I am ready to die that you may live."

"And now—"

"Now," the native interrupted, "it would be best for the *señor* to sit and rest, while I prepare some hot food. Then whatever he commands shall be done."

"There was a pirate ship in the offing, and another," Zorro insinuated.

"*Sí, señor!* The pirate ship ran from the other, going out to sea. But a short time ago I saw her pass, going toward the bay where the pirates have their headquarters. And the other ship passed but a short time ago, pursuing."

"By the saints!" Zorro cried. "I would go to this pirates' den of which you speak, and as speedily as possible."

"The *señor* must eat first, so that he will have strength," the native said, firmly. "Then I will guide the *señor* to the spot. It is ten miles, and the *señor* is a weak man."

"I will eat the food gladly," Zorro replied. "Do you prepare it as speedily as possible. There shall be an ample reward."

"It is reward enough that I have been able to save the *señor's* life," the native answered. "The friends of Señor Zorro do not forget what he did for them!"

CHAPTER XVI.

SINGING CABALLEROS.

BARBADOS was like a maniac after the pirate craft swung away from the trading schooner. He shrieked at his men to make sail, and they needed but little urging. The fear of the supernatural was upon them, superstition ruled their minds.

Gradually they crept away from the schooner, but Barbados continued to watch her closely. He saw the new sails going aloft, and realized that there would be a pursuit. So he turned out to sea and began running for it.

He did not attempt to explain things to himself. He knew that his men outnumbered those on the schooner, and he felt reasonably sure that, in an engagement, the pirate crew would emerge victorious. Yet something seemed to tell him that the

proper thing was to avoid the engagement if possible.

"We will lose that sorry craft in the wide waters," he told Sanchez, "and then we will turn and go to the rendezvous. There we'll unload and apportion the loot, and care for the wench until the man comes to claim her. If we are followed, we can outfight the *caballeros* on land. The ghost of a man drowned in the sea is powerless on land, I have heard."

"And, if they follow us ashore—" Sanchez questioned.

"Then we fight them, fool," Barbados said. "You are still shaking like a child! A pirate—you? Ha! By my naked blade, you are no better than a woman in this business!"

"Men are men, but it is not in my mind to fight with ghosts," Sanchez told him. "We are bedeviled for some reason!"

"Ha!" Barbados gasped. "That reminds me!" He turned away and walked the length of the deck, and finally came across the man he sought, and drew him aside. "You have the thing yet?" he asked.

"The goblet? *Si, señor!* If the captain wishes it—"

"Do not even show it to me!" Barbados commanded. "I would have you toss it into the sea, save that such an act might bring worse luck yet. So long as you retain it, perhaps you draw all the ill fortune to yourself. Spawn of hell, if ever you come face to face with that old *fray*, in flesh or in spirit, have a look to yourself! For you have done an evil thing!"

Barbados passed on, and descended to the cabin where Señorita Lolita had been returned a prisoner.

She was as a woman stunned. She had fainted when Señor Zorro had plunged into the sea, and Sanchez had carried her below. And when she regained consciousness she remained on the bunk and groaned and prayed by turns.

And now, when Barbados opened the door, she sat up quickly, a look of agony in her face. One thing she had done—picked up from the floor of the cabin the dagger that had belonged to the man Señor Zorro had slain through the crack. She

had cleaned it, and thrust it in the bosom of her dress, where it was out of sight, but where she could reach it instantly.

Barbados looked at her for a moment, and then spoke.

"In your right mind again, eh wench?" he said. "We are running away from your friends, and there can be no hope of rescue. It would be proper for you to make the best of it. The man for whom we have stolen you perchance will be kind."

"Foul beast and murderer!" the *señorita* said.

"Ha!" Barbados gasped. "I have been called worse things than that—things that you do not know exists, wench! Think you to hurt my tough hide with words?"

"Have you no manhood?" she asked. "Is it an honor for a score of men to take a girl captive? You struck down my father and burned my home! You sent to his death the man I love—"

"There are other men," said Barbados, "and other homes. And I did not strike down your father—Sanchez did that. From what he tells me, the blow was not a fatal one."

"You are the chief of murderers and thieves, the one responsible," she said.

"Words do not hurt my tough hide, I have said. It were best for you to be calm."

"Calm?" The *señorita* crept from the bunk, weak and staggering, her face white, her lips trembling, a suspicion of tears in her eyes. "Calm?" she repeated. "And how can you expect me to be calm? What is there in the future for me, save dishonor or death? When the moment comes, it will not take me long to choose!"

"Ha! When the moment comes, you may change your mind!"

"He whom you sent to death in the sea was worth ten score of you!" she cried, stepping closer to him. "And each of his friends who follow in that other ship are worth ten score of you! Do you think that you can escape them forever?"

"I can have them wiped from the face of the earth!" Barbados replied.

"Escape them, possibly—but not me!" she cried. "I have seen you kill the thing I love! And so—"

She clutched at her breast and drew forth the dagger. She gave a cry of rage, and struck out wildly. Barbados, caught unawares, lurched quickly to one side, but the blade struck his arm and tore away flesh and skin and brought a gush of blood.

"By my naked blade—" he swore.

He whirled as she struck again and missed, grasped her, and tore the dagger from her hand. He tossed her back upon the bunk, where she braced herself against the wall, gasping, weeping, expecting that now he would make an end of her.

But the pirate chief merely slipped the dagger into his belt, glanced at his wounded arm, swore again, and then stepped back to the door.

"A wench with spirit, eh?" he said. "Ha! I would not be this Captain Ramón and have the taming of you! Glad will I be when I turn you over to him! I have battles enough on my hands without fighting women! I'll send a man soon with food. Such a female warrior must eat to conserve her strength!"

He laughed at her, mocked her, went out and closed the door, and she heard the heavy bar shot into place and the sounds of his feet retreating. She collapsed on the bunk and gave way to a tempest of tears.

"Diego!" she breathed. "Diego, beloved!"

Barbados ascended to the deck, bathed the wound in his arm, and said nothing when Sanchez questioned him. Throughout the day he gave his attention to the sailing of the ship, but he could not shake off the schooner which followed.

Then came the night, and once more Barbados cursed the bright moon. For, though his craft showed no lights, yet could she be seen from the schooner. Back and forth Barbados sailed, but always failing to shake off the other ship. And when there came the dark hour before dawn he changed his course abruptly, and ran before the breeze.

But when the dawn came there was the schooner, a greater distance away, but still in sight. And so Barbados put off to sea again, for he wished, if it were possible, to go to the land rendezvous without drawing

his foes there. Else he slew all of them, news of the pirates' headquarters would leak out, and they would have to move.

He ran before the wind, he tacked, he beat in toward the shore, out to sea, to the north and the south and the west. Now he gained, and now the schooner gained upon him. He cursed and drove his men, but they could accomplish nothing.

And finally he started running down the coast, intent upon reaching the rendezvous. If the men of the schooner dared follow him to land, they would be annihilated, he promised. Once or twice he felt like turning and forming an attack, but thoughts of the ghost of Señor Zorro deterred him.

"A sea ghost cannot fight on land!" Barbados told himself. "On land I have them at my mercy!"

The day started to die, and the pirate craft rushed down the coast with the schooner in close pursuit. It was almost nightfall when Barbados and his men guided the ship into the little bay. The schooner was some miles behind.

The anchor dropped, the ship swung broadside to the shore. From the land came sounds of a tumult, and down into the surf rushed men and women and children. The pirates' stronghold could be seen back some distance from the water.

There was a wide expanse of beach, a deep open space fringed with stubby trees and brush. Hills landlocked the scene. A score of huts dotted the edge of the flat. Fires were burning on the shore, stock ran wild among the habitations.

Overside went the boats, and the pirates commenced handing down the loot. Shrieks and calls came from the women and children on the shore, from the men who had been left behind as guards.

Barbados went ashore in the first boat, and began issuing his commands. The camp was to be put in a state for defense, he explained. Guards were to be established on the three land sides, and other men would watch the sea. The ship was warped closer to the shore, so that she could be defended easily.

Just as the night descended, the trading schooner sailed across the mouth of the bay, and presently she returned, farther

out to sea. Barbados boarded the ship again, and took the *señorita* from her cabin. Sanchez lashed her wrists behind her.

"You go ashore, wench!" Barbados said. "And there you are to be held until such a time as this Captain Ramón comes to claim you. Why he should want you is more than I can explain to myself. You are a pretty wench, it is true, but too much of a spitfire!"

He watched her closely when she was in the boat. And when they landed the pirates' women and the ragged children rushed forward to jeer at her as she passed beside the flaming fire. Barbados took her to a large adobe building, the best structure in the camp. He opened the door and thrust her inside.

A woman cooking over an open fire whirled to look at him. She looked at the *señorita*, too, and her eyes flamed.

"What is this?" she demanded, her fists against her hips. "Is it a younger and prettier woman?"

"It is, indeed, Inez," Barbados laughed. "She is a share of the loot!"

"Your share, eh? And you dare to fetch her here?"

"Why not?" Barbados asked.

"To my face?" the woman screeched. She was of middle age, a creature hideous in a way. "So! It has come at last, has it? I am to be tossed aside for a comely wench you have stolen from some rich *hacienda*!"

"Jealousy is a foolish thing," Barbados observed. "Think you, Inez, to hold my love for life?"

"None other shall have it!" the woman screeched. She flashed forward, her hand raised to strike, her nails ready to tear into the *señorita's* fair face. But Barbados seized her and tossed her roughly aside.

"Peace!" he cried. "I want none of the wench! She is to be kept a prisoner until claimed. A share of the loot she is, but not my share. She was stolen for a great man!"

"This is the truth?" the woman asked.

"Do I generally speak falsehood?" Barbados thundered. "Enough! Put her in the storeroom, and feed her well. Treat her gently. She must be in prime condi-

tion when she is claimed. We were followed by a schooner upon which are *caballeros* striving to rescue her. She must not be rescued!"

The woman grinned horribly. She opened the door of a room adjoining and motioned for the *señorita* to enter. She stepped aside, and Lolita Pulido, looking straight ahead, her eyes fixed and glistening, went into the storeroom without speaking, her head held proudly.

Barbados hurried outside again. The black night had descended, but soon the moon was shining. Guards were sent into the fringe of woods, and a watchman to the summit of a hill in the rear. Men were posted on the ship, men walked around the huts, alert, ready to repel an attack.

But there came no attack during the night. The trading schooner had run down the coast and back, and then anchored two miles north of the bay.

"I know the place," the captain told Don Audre Ruiz. "Once some years ago I ran in there during a storm. Their camp must be in the open, and there will be no advantage in the attack. There can be no surprise, of course."

"What is your good advice?" Don Audre asked.

"That you land here with your *caballeros*, approach the camp and wait for the dawn. I'll land as many of my crew as can be spared from the ship, and let them circle the camp to attack from the other side. There must be men enough held here to get the schooner to sea for a run if the pirate craft comes out at us."

"That is agreed!" Don Audre said.

"But it will be a sorry business, Don Audre! You will be outnumbered three to one. And you may be sure that there are men in the camp who were not on the pirate ship. They may have a few pistols they have captured from ships, but it will be hand to hand work with blades. Three to one, at least, Don Audre!"

Don Audre Ruiz drew himself up. "Three beasts to one *caballero*," he said. "It is an equal affair. There can be no hesitating, *señor*. *Señorita* Lolita Pulido is held a captive by those beasts. And I am not forgetting what happened to Don Die-

go, my friend! There is but one thing to do—attack! At least, we can die!”

There was a short conference, and then the boats began carrying the men to the shore. The *caballeros* approached to within a mile of the pirate camp and stopped to rest, sending scouts on ahead. The men of the crew circled to the other side.

Some of the *caballeros* slept, sprawled on the sand. But Don Audre Ruiz sat beside a tiny fire he had kindled, his knees drawn up and nursing them with his hands.

“At least we can die, Diego!” he said, softly. “And we can strive mightily before we do that!”

The black hour came, and then the first finger of the dawn. Don Audre arose and stretched himself, and walked for a time up and down the beach. The *caballeros* shook off their sleep, bathed their faces at the edge of the sea, exercised their muscles, whipped out their blades and fanned the air.

Sergeant Gonzales, who had snored throughout the night, snorted as he bathed his face and hands, and then strode down to Don Audre and confronted him.

“*Señor*, you are in command of this enterprise,” the sergeant said. “There are orders?”

“Only that every man is to do his best,” Don Audre replied. “The *señorita* is to be rescued if it is possible, and returned to the schooner.”

“And the pirates are to be hanged?”

“Any that do not fall by our swords and are captured.”

“Ha! It is a nuisance to hang a man!” Gonzales declared. “We would have to go to the ship for a rope. The blade is better! Fray Felipe!”

“*Señor?*” the *fray* questioned. He approached them.

“You are yet my friend,” Gonzales said. “If you get into the thick of it, stand you behind me, that I may protect you. But a battle is not a place for a *fray*. Stay you behind, and say your prayers!”

“There is the matter of the goblet,” Fray Felipe replied, softly.

“By the saints, I take it upon myself to get the goblet for you, *fray*!”

“Do so, and I call you son!”

Sergeant Gonzales bared his head for an instant. He looked at Fray Felipe as though embarrassed, and then returned his hat to his head and gulped. “I have been an evil man in my time,” he said, “but I trust that the saints will forget it for this day at least. I would have added strength to this good right arm of mine! Don Audre, I am ready!”

Don Audre Ruiz led the way along the shore. They crept nearer the camp of the pirates, spread out fan fashion, and approached boldly. They reached the crest of a slope, and saw the camp spread before them in the first rays of the morning sun.

The pirates seemed to be more numerous than even Don Audre Ruiz had expected. It looked to be a hopeless task, this attack. But there was something to urge them on.

They stopped to look at one another. In silks and satins and plumes they were, with their jeweled swords at their sides. And before them the stronghold, with the ragged, dirty pirates there ready to give battle.

“If *Señor Zorro* were only here to lead us!” Don Audre Ruiz said, with a sigh. “But he is not—and let us remember why he is not—and strike the harder because of our remembrance! If you are ready—”

He whipped out his gleaming blade and waved it above his head, and the *caballeros* drew blades in turn, and answered him with their cheers.

And so they advanced to the attack—slowly, carefully, in a perfect line. And Don Audre Ruiz, because he wanted to give himself and the others added courage, and because he felt that it was fitting, sang lustily a song of old:

“Singing *caballeros*, going forth to die!
Laughing in the face of grinning Death!
Facing task that’s hopeless, ready yet to try!
Singing with the last of earthly breath!”

The *caballeros* took up the refrain and sang it through to the end, their voices ringing across the sea and the land. And, the song at an end, they were grim and silent again, intent upon the bloody business before them. The pirates were preparing, they could see. In a very few minutes the clash would come.

And suddenly, from the distance, from

the slope between the two attacking forces, came a solitary voice, also raised in song:

"Atención! A caballero's near—"

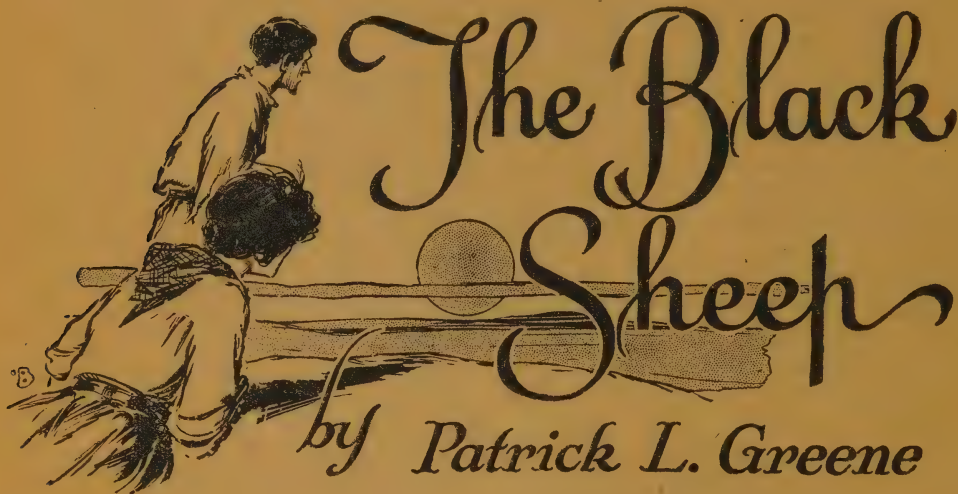
They glanced up, astounded. Running down the slope toward them came a figure

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

they knew well. Don Audre Ruiz gave a great cry of joy and thankfulness. The *caballeros* cheered, and wept unashamed. For well they knew the singer and the song.

"Zorro!" they cried. "Zorro!"

And so they rushed to the attack!



JONESBURG was a typical South African settlement. That is to say, it was composed of one long dusty street, broken here and there by optimistic beginnings of other streets, which somehow were never completed, never would be completed, though they were already named. Such grandiose, fine sounding names they had, too!

Jonesburg houses were mainly built of tin, though an occasional wooden structure thrust itself proudly forward, and, here and there, an adaptation of the mud walled, thatched roofs of native huts, broke the monotony; afforded a welcome relief from the sun-reflecting, ugly tin shacks.

A small, red painted, mission church, its bent and crooked spire dimly reminiscent of a candle melting in the fierce rays of the sun, was shut in on one side by the bank, and on the other, by a large, barn like structure dignified by the name Royal Hotel.

A general store run by a man who called himself O'Brien—but he did not eat pork and closed his store on Saturdays!—completed the list of public buildings, if one ex-

cepts the stone jail built by native convict labor.

A stranger was apt to wonder why any town, of any sort, should be located in that particular spot, and, in truth, Jonesburg seemed to have no reason for its existence. It was set at the edge of a desolate tract of veldt devoid of trees, two hundred miles, or more, from the nearest railroad. To the north of it lay a great waste of hill country, ridge after ridge of barren, jagged kopjes, sparsely populated by a nomadic tribe of natives closely related to the tiny bush people.

Somewhere in the waste of hills, rumor ran, was gold, and at Jonesburg men "out-fitted" before making a prospecting trip into the unknown.

So Jonesburg sprang into being and stifled and sweated through the long drought of the dry season; shivered with the ague of fever through the months of rain, waiting—always waiting—and hoping for a rich strike to be made in the hills beyond; a strike that would bring the gold-hungry swarms of men, the railroad, and the blessings of civilization.

A few farmers, descendants of the first Dutch settlers, eked out a parlous existence on the fringes of the township, but for the most part the population—barely a thousand all told—were prospectors and their families; always optimistic, always sure that the next trip would be crowned by success.

In Jonesburg—and it is true of all small towns—the social scale was very clearly defined, though, to be sure, it was only recognized by the women and a few hypocritical men.

The women turned their heads the other way and snorted with disgust should they happen to come face to face with either of the girls who presided at the bar of the Royal Hotel, and bemoaned that they should have to suffer their contaminating presence. The ladies of the sewing circle, whenever they met, were sure to discuss with bated breath the evil doings and backslidings of an absent member's husband; or even of the absent member!

Human nature is much the same the world over, and wherever man congregates it is sure to fall into the same classifications. The only difference is, mayhap, in the degree of wickedness which enthalls the bad element, according to the remoteness of the community from the centers of civilization and the corresponding lack of restraint.

It is typical, too, that Jonesburg should have had a rising young man; one honored by all the inhabitants, generally esteemed, a favorite with men and women alike. He, John Ritchie, was the local representative of the government—a civil servant, a justice of the peace and commissioner of mines.

Again Jonesburg had its town drunkard, its waster, its ne'er-do-well, its remittance man. Certain of the church coterie deplored his presence, while the saloon habitués preferred him to John, his brother.

"It is disgraceful," snorted the church people. "If Frank Ritchie had half the respect and affection for John that he claims to have, he'd leave the settlement. Poor John! What a cross it must be for him to have such a brother!"

They did not know that John, laboring

under the hope that he would be able to reform his brother, had begged Frank to remain in Jonesburg. He knew that if he allowed him to drift away, free from all restraint, he might sink even lower than he was now. At least he was "clean" still, that was something; that was a great deal. He had not betrayed his race, he had not gone "black." From drunkenness and shiftlessness there is an escape, but once a white man takes up his abode with, and among, the natives there is no way out; he is damned, body and soul.

"Hell!" complained the saloon loungers. "You'd think that John would loosen up a little. Don't see how he can stand by and see his brother half starving most of the time."

They did not know that John had offered to supplement his brother's remittance from home, and that Frank had refused it. He was sober at the time.

"It would do no good, old man. I'd be drunk a little longer, that's all."

"Why don't you quit, Frank?" John had asked. But he knew the question was a hopeless one; he had asked it many times before. He knew that his brother had made many resolutions to run straight; always, during the week or so of sobriety that marked the passing of his allowance and the extent of his credit at the hotel, Frank would make many resolutions, would even go to work in O'Brien's store. And always, when a fresh remittance arrived, the good resolutions were forgotten.

Once John had added to his plea:

"For the honor of the family, Frank."

And Frank had laughed.

"That rests securely in your hands, old man. The family doesn't bother about me, and they sent me out here so that I wouldn't bother them."

John sighed.

His brother had been expelled from college for some boyish prank, following a heavy drinking bout to celebrate a rowing victory, and his family had sent him to Africa to "make a man of him" as they put it.

Many black sheep are sent out to the colony to be made "men of." The people at home forget that Africa is not hedged

around by the conventionalities, the restraining influences of civilization; there are no moral watchdogs to say: "Thou shalt not do this or that," or "Such and such a thing is not done," and the poor black sheep are likely to wander still farther astray.

"But think of me, Frank," John had continued. "Think how your behavior reacts on my position here."

"You?" Frank looked at his brother, a curious light in his eyes. "I'll go away if you say so. If I'm bothering you I'll leave at once."

John shook his head vehemently.

"You know I don't want you to do that, Frank. We're a long way from home and we must stick together. But I do wish you would brace up and—"

But at that point the mail came in and Frank rushed off impetuously. His remittance was long overdue.

II.

Two men sprawled on the floor of the shaded piazza which encircled the Royal Hotel.

Before each was a lump of sugar and between them a little pile of money.

The men—one an old, weather-beaten, leathery skinned prospector; the other a young man of some five or six and twenty, his clothing shabby, and general appearance unkempt—did not move, scarcely drew a breath, but watched, with unwavering eyes, the pieces of sugar before them.

After a while a fly alighted on the lump that was before the younger man, and with a chuckle of triumph he swept up the money and rattled it exultantly in his hands.

"Going to bet again, Pete?"

The old prospector picked up his lump of sugar and putting it in his mouth, crunched it noisily before answering:

"Nope, I'm finished. Here we've been sitting nigh onto half an hour and not one fly lighted on my piece. I know when the luck's agin me, and I'm through. Believe there's only one fly in the place, anyhow, an' that you've got him trained to come and sit on your lump."

At that moment a fly alighted on his head and he slapped at it viciously.

The younger man laughed.

"Of course the flies won't settle on your lump when they see your shining bald pate. You should have kept your hat on, Pete."

The old prospector snorted and slowly rose to his feet.

"I've got to be moving along, Frank. The old woman 'll be expecting me."

"Come and have a drink first, Pete."

"Nope. The last time I had a drink with you some one had to carry me home, and I haven't heard the last of it yet; you don't know my old woman. But I thought you were on the 'tack'?"

The other laughed as he, too, rose.

"So I was until, thanks to you and the little fly, I got some money. Sure you won't have one? No? Then there'll be all the more for me. So long, Pete."

With flushed face, his eyes alight with anticipation, he turned and almost ran into the saloon.

Just inside the door he collided with a big, gross man, Barker by name.

"What's the hurry, Frank," the other asked jovially. "Has your remittance arrived?"

"No," impatiently, "not yet."

The smile of good fellowship faded from the fat man's face, and he took Ritchie roughly by the arm.

"Well, see here, I've got to go out, but don't you think you can get any more booze on 'tick.' You already owe me—"

Ritchie struggled free from Barker's grip.

"Don't worry, Barker," he said with a sneer. "You'll get your money all right. If you had a few more customers as good as I am you wouldn't need to swindle honest prospectors out of their pay dirt."

Barker grew crimson with wrath.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Oh, never mind," the other replied airily. "And don't be afraid; I'll pay for what I drink to-day."

He rattled the money he had won from Pete under Barker's nose, and then passed on through the saloon proper and entered a small room dignified by the title of parlor.

Slouching down heavily into a chair by one of the tables he arranged his winnings

in a little heap before him. It totaled exactly twenty shillings, and a bottle of whisky was twenty-one shillings. A feverish search through the pockets of his worn clothing resulted in the discovery of the needed coin.

With a sigh of relief he stamped loudly on the floor. A panel in the wall shot back and the head of Belle, one of the barmaids, appeared at the aperture.

"What do you want?" she called harshly; then, seeing who the early customer was, she added in a softer voice:

"Is that you, Frankie, old duck? Goin' to let me treat you? Barker won't let yer 'ave any more credit."

Belle's change of tone was, in a way, indicative of the attitude of the people of Jonesburg toward Frank Ritchie. No one could be really angry with him, not even those who loudest deplored his dissolute conduct. Many hardened old reprobates like Pete had tried to reform the boy, striving to resurrect the straight-limbed, clear-eyed, clean living youngster who had won their affection and esteem when he first came out to join his brother.

"I don't want any credit, Belle," he replied. "All I want is a bottle of whisky, and I'll pay for it."

"All right. 'Ave it yer own way."

The head was withdrawn and the panel closed with a slam. A moment later the door of the room opened and Belle entered, bearing a bottle of whisky and a glass on a tray.

As seen behind the bar at night Belle was a treat for tired eyes, at least for veldt weary eyes; for eyes that had for so long been deprived of the sight of a decent woman. When she stood where the light of the hanging lamp shone upon her she represented all that was desirable to tired prospectors, and they forgot, for a while, the hardships they had undergone, the hardships they were still to undergo in their search for gold. Her hair was like a halo of light; her cheeks were rosy with the bloom of youth; her eyes sparkled; her boldly modeled figure was more than hinted at by the open-work lace blouses she affected.

But now, seen by the searching rays of

the sun which streamed through a window close to where Frank was seated, she reminded one of a brightly colored, many patterned, piece of cheap cretonne, the colors of which had run in the wash. Her eyes were pale and lusterless. The yellow glint of her hair was shaded at the roots by a nondescript brown. The color of her cheeks was, literally, washed off, and her figure, wrapped in a soiled kimono, slumped pathetically. But there was one thing that not even the truth revealing sun could take away from her—rather it seemed to accentuate it—and that was her big heartedness.

Belle should have been the mother of a large family. Circumstances and environment depriving her of that, she found an outlet for her natural emotions in being "one of the boys." She was a good pal, and not a few men, now more or less prosperous, owe whatever they may have to the fact that Belle once staked them.

She ran one much beringed hand lightly through Ritchie's hair, while he, ignoring and indifferent to the caress, reached avidly for the bottle, poured himself a drink and swallowed it at a gulp. A second quickly followed the first.

"My! You certainly can put the booze away," she said.

He looked up with a scowl as though conscious for the first time of her presence. Just now his sole craving was for drink. He had passed through a week of enforced sobriety, and as a result, his nerves were on edge; he wanted to be alone.

"What are you hanging around here for? There's the money."

With a wave of his hand he indicated the little pile of coins on the table.

She ignored his question.

"So yer wouldn't 'ave a drink with me, eh? There's some as 'ud be glad of the chance."

"I don't doubt it," he grunted.

"Your brother, for instance."

She looked at him curiously to see how the news would affect him. Apparently he had not heard her, for he was in the act of pouring out another drink.

"Hi said," she repeated distinctly, "your brother, for instance."

He laughed softly.

"I heard you the first time. John drink with you! Don't make me laugh, Belle!"

Belle tossed her head indignantly.

"Is that so?" she retorted hotly. "Well, see 'ere wot 'e gave me."

She pointed to a large diamond ring which seemed to accentuate the grime of her fingers.

Ritchie's hand, in the act of conveying the glass to his mouth, was arrested in mid air. He looked at Belle, then at the ring and back to Belle again.

She flushed before his insolent gaze.

"Pinch yourself, Belle," he said. "You are dreaming."

The hand continued the interrupted journey to his lips, and he drank—slowly this time, swishing the liquor around his mouth that he might get the full flavor of it.

"Where's Mary?" he asked suddenly.

"Hout. She's quite a pal of yours, ain't she? I've 'eard tell that you was sweet on 'er at one time, and she on you. Though what a man can see in 'er—she's so quiet; ain't got no spunk—is more than I can say. For that matter Hi can't see wot she sees in you."

"Why—" began Ritchie wrathfully. Then his roving eye once again fell on the diamond ring, and he burst into a roar of laughter.

Belle tossed her head indignantly and flounced out of the room, leaving the money on the table.

Ritchie's first impulse was to call her back, but after a momentary hesitation he picked up the coins and put them in his pocket.

"They'll buy another bottle," he muttered, "and I can pay Belle when my remittance comes to-morrow."

III.

WHEN he awoke from the heavy, sodden sleep of intoxication the sun had long since set and the room was in darkness.

He groped for the whisky bottle, and, finding it empty, was on the point of calling for another when the door opened and a girl, bearing a lamp, entered.

Now, Mary Foster was all that Belle was not. Even the ladies of the sewing circle could find nothing against her. She was a Jonesburg girl, born and bred. Her father, who had died a year previously, was one of the first settlers in the district and a prospector of the best type.

Many times Mary had accompanied him on his trips to the hills beyond, and, though the search for gold had been fruitless, Mary had discovered something infinitely more precious—health, self-reliance, and honesty of purpose. She had learned to surmount the petty conventionalities which hedge in her sex; had learned to play the game, never to give up.

It was this ability to see a thing through to the end, this steadfastness of purpose, that enabled her to play a part that was altogether distasteful to her.

She became a barmaid, not because other avenues of employment were closed to her, but because she hoped, in some way which was not quite clear to her, to be able to help the man she loved.

With an exaggerated show of courtesy, grave of countenance—liquor affects some men that way—Ritchie rose from his chair and made a profound bow as the girl approached him; nor would he resume his chair until she herself was seated.

"Gen'men never sit in the presence of ladies," he mumbled.

Her dark, gray eyes clouded as she saw the empty whisky bottle; noted the twitching muscles of his face, and the bloodshot eyes. From his face her eyes wandered to his huddled form. His body was like a delicate yet powerful machine made useless by abuse and reckless treatment.

She sighed deeply.

"Wha's the matter, Mary?"

"Oh, I'm blue, Frank. I'm sick of this beastly hole. Night after night I pour out drinks for thirsty men, and wipe up dripping suds of beer. Ugh! how I hate it all."

"Cheer up, old sport. I'll tell you something that'll make you laugh. You know that diamond ring Belle's wearing?"

Mary nodded.

"Well"—he chuckled in anticipation of the joke—"she said that John, old sober-sides John, gave it to her."

He burst into a paroxysm of laughter, which ended abruptly when he saw that the girl did not join in.

"Don't you think that's funny?" he asked in injured tones.

She shook her head.

"It's true, I think. Belle told me about it. John's been to see her a lot of times lately. Didn't you know?"

Again he laughed.

"You must think I'm drunk, Mary, to expect me to believe a tale like that. As a mat' of fac', I'm as sober as a judge. I'll prove it to you; I'll sing—"

"Don't, please, Frank," she interposed hastily. "If you sing 'Asleep in the Deep,' or anything else, I'll go stark raving mad."

She buried her face in her hands; her shoulder heaved convulsively.

"What's the matter? Somebody insult you? Tell me his name and I'll—"

"No. It's not that, Frank. But I'm so lonely. I want to get away from here, where not a soul would care if I died to-morrow."

"You forget me," he said lightly. "You know I love you."

She looked up quickly, hopefully, but saw that his eyes, dull and expressionless, were fixed on the empty whisky bottle. She hesitated a moment; then, taking a deep breath, said with a nervous laugh:

"I'll tell you what, Frank. I'll get another bottle, and we'll have a little party in here all to ourselves."

"You're on. That's the way to talk, Mary. Wait. Here's the money. Never let a lady pay for drinks—it's bad form."

IV.

SOME time later, when the bottle was almost empty, and the two, the man and the girl, had apparently laughed themselves into a state of exhaustion, Mary said suddenly:

"Why don't you give up drinking, Frank?"

He laughed shrilly and pointed a finger of scorn at her.

"You're a nice un to talk."

It did look like Satan rebuking Satan.

Mary's long, dark hair, usually coiled neatly about her shapely head, hung down upon her shoulders. Her face was flushed, her eyes were unnaturally bright. Whisky stains besmirched the freshness of her rose-pink dress.

"Never mind about me," she replied gravely. "How about you? How about the family honor? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Everybody's down on me," he complained, and began to weep maudlin tears. "You're talking just like John."

"John!" she giggled. "He's got no right to talk, the way he's running round with Belle."

Her mood suddenly changed.

"Nobody cares for me," she wailed.

A cunning gleam came into Ritchie's eyes.

"Let's get married, then we can take care of each other," he said; "an' it 'll teach old John a lesson," he added to himself.

"All right," she assented quickly. "We will do it to-night; but let's have another drink first."

She poured out the remainder of the whisky and watched him drink; then, taking him by the arm, she led him, reeling, through the crowded saloon out into the night.

V.

WHEN Ritchie awoke the next day it was long past noon. For a while he lay, motionless, on the cot that almost filled his tiny hut, trying to pierce through the thick clouds which separated this day from yesterday.

"It must have been a dream," he concluded with a laugh. "Dreaming one's getting married is better than seeing pink elephants."

He tossed about restlessly for a few minutes, wondering that he should have slept so late. Then came the thought that with to-day's mail his remittance would arrive, and he aroused himself instantly.

"Sixpence!" he called.

A native, more dilapidated looking, if possible, than his *baas*, came into the hut.

"Yes, *baas*?"

"Bring water and make some coffee."

"Yah, *baas*. The coffee is already made."

He left the hut and, quickly returning, brought in a big cup of hot coffee and a large bucket of water.

Ritchie gulped down the steaming concoction, then, rising, sluiced himself with water from the pail. He dried himself briskly, shaved and dressed, taking an almost meticulous care in the knotting of his tie.

The reason for this extraordinary effort on his part was that he was dining that night with John.

Once a month the two brothers dined together, on the day that Frank's remittance arrived; once a month Frank attempted to live up to the requirements of a gentleman.

This dinner was John's idea. It was his last point, his only point, of contact with Frank. And Frank always attended; because it was the only way he could get his remittance cashed, and the final vestiges of pride left in him would not permit him to go to his brother other than clean—at least physically clean.

His toilet completed, he walked slowly down to the jail, which also served as a post office, to find that the mail cart had arrived some hours previously. The policeman in charge handed him a long, legal-looking envelope, the only mail he ever received, and after exchanging a jest or two with the officer he wandered back to his brother's house.

As he walked up the dusty driveway the door opened and a woman emerged. She stood for a moment where the light from the hall lamp fell full on her, and Frank saw, with a start of amazement, that it was Belle.

The door closed and the woman vanished. She had evidently taken one of the side paths, for Frank did not meet her on the driveway. He remembered now something that Belle, and later Mary, had said yesterday. Could there, after all, have been some truth in it he wondered?

A fierce resentment burned within him. To think that John should lecture him when he, John, was philandering with such

a woman as Belle. His resentment took the form of righteous indignation. He quickened his steps, and, finding the door of the house slightly ajar, went in.

He stood for a moment in indecision. From one of the rooms, his brother's office, which opened off the spacious hall, came a low groan of despair and the words:

"My God! This is the end."

He burst in the room just in time to see his brother bring a revolver slowly up to his temple. With a hoarse cry Frank threw himself upon John, and for a few tense moments the two men wrestled for the possession of the weapon.

Suddenly the older man released his grip, and, sinking into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

"What's it all about, John?"

Frank passed his hands across his eyes.. That John, good old sober John, should be trying to commit suicide was unthinkable. The other lifted a haggard face.

"Why didn't you let me finish it, Frank?"

"But why?"

"I'm ruined, Frank! Oh, what a fool I've been! You see," he continued hurriedly, "when I first came out here I thought I was in love with Belle, and wrote her a lot of fool letters." His tone was dull and monotonous, like one repeating a badly learned lesson. "She's been blackmailing me, Frank, and I've paid her whatever she asked. God knows I've paid! If I hadn't she would have sent the letters to Alice."

Alice was the daughter of the clergyman, and John was engaged to marry her.

"That's nothing to worry about," said Frank in relieved tones. "I thought you loved her now. Cheer up, old man; things might be worse."

"They couldn't be worse. Belle was greedy; she demanded all I had—more than I had. I took the government money to pay her, and in to-night's mail there was a letter from my chief saying that he will be here to-morrow to go over my accounts."

"You're welcome to my remittance check, John."

The other laughed.

"I gave Belle one thousand pounds, Frank."

Frank whistled. His remittance was only fifty.

"You damned fool!" he ejaculated.

"I know. But I never expected the chief so soon. He was here only a month ago, and in the ordinary run of events he would not have come this way again until next year. That would have given me time to make up the deficit. But now—" He shook his head.

"Poor dad and mother," he went on. "This will break their hearts. It's up to you; the family honor's in your hands, Frank."

Frank laughed harshly.

"You know what I'll do as soon as I get my remittance cashed. You've money on hand for that, I hope."

"Yes."

John took the check his brother handed him, and from the cash box which stood on the desk counted out fifty sovereigns.

Frank swept the money into his pocket.

"Good-by, Frank," John's voice trembled. "You'd better leave me the revolver—it's the only way. Try and keep the real news from the folks at home and—I know I have no right to preach—but can't you"—there was now a pleading note in his voice—"pull yourself together and so help to make up to them for my failure?"

Frank turned to go and John took up the revolver.

"Put that down," Frank said, wheeling suddenly. "Now, don't interrupt, but answer my questions. Have you got the letters from Belle now?"

"Yes. She brought them to-night."

"Then you've nothing further to fear from her?"

"No. Not from her."

"Where do you keep your money, John?"

"In there." He indicated the tin cash box. "Why?"

"Never mind. How about the thousand you gave to Belle? Did you keep that there?"

"Yes. It was mainly in large notes. I kept the cash box in the desk drawer."

"John?"

"Yes?"

"Damn it all, man, we can't have two black sheep in the family."

John did not answer.

Frank took the revolver from the desk, and with the butt of it, smashed the lock of the cash box. Two or three well-directed kicks smashed in the drawer of the desk, and he rummaged through the papers, throwing some of them on the floor. A small charm which dangled from his watch chain caught on the lock of the drawer. He jerked it violently. A link parted, and the charm remained fast caught on the lock.

"Listen, John," said Frank. "To-morrow morning you will report that your desk has been broken open and a large sum of money stolen—one thousand pounds, to be exact. The policeman who comes up to investigate will find this"—he pointed to the charm—"and, naturally, will set out to arrest me. When he arrives at my hut he will find that I've 'flown the coop.' To make it appear still more likely that I'm the thief, you can tell the police that I asked you for more money, and when you refused, swore to get even with you."

John seemed about to utter a protest, but the other silenced him with an impatient gesture.

"You'll do this, John, for the honor of the family. You ought to recognize that phrase. You've been dinning it into me, once a month, for the past year."

John inclined his head in mute agreement.

"Very well. Then there's nothing more to say, is there?"

"No. There's nothing more to say, Frank. It's all clear and—I'm going to accept your sacrifice. It's for the sake of—you know."

"Yes—I know," Frank assented, grimly.

"But suppose they catch you, Frank? How will you account for the fact that you haven't the money?"

"I'd thought of that, too. I'll say that I've hidden it. But don't worry, they won't catch me. Now let's forget this and go to 'scoff'; or have you forgotten this is our night to dine together?"

"No! I had not forgotten. I'll go and give the 'boys' orders to serve it."

As Frank started to follow his brother from the room he was seized by a sudden, uncontrollable desire to laugh. It appealed to his risibilities that he, the black sheep of the family, should, by this queer twist of fate, be the instrument of preserving the family honor!

VI.

WHEN Frank left his brother's house he walked quickly to his hut, taking good care to avoid casual wayfarers. Only once did his determination waver, and that was when he passed the Royal Hotel. Opposite this building he paused a moment. Then the door of the saloon opened, and fearful of being seen, he hurried on his way. When he reached his hut and entered, through the door, he gave a sigh of relief, well satisfied that no one had seen him.

For an hour or more he sat in the darkness, waiting for the time to come when he must set out on his journey to the railroad. This period of inaction was a hard test for him, and he fought hard against the desire to go to the hotel bar.

The moon rose, the soft mellow rays filtered through the window of the hut, filling it with light. It was almost time to go.

He rose to his feet and made the final arrangements for his journey. He wondered if he would be able to get his horse from O'Brien's stable without being observed. It would try him sorely, he knew, should O'Brien see him and invite him to have a drink.

The door opened, and a woman slowly entered the hut.

"Mary!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"Who has a better right? Have you forgotten that I am your wife, Frank?"

He almost collapsed with astonishment.

"Then it was true; it was no nightmare?"

"Not unless you make it so, Frank."

He pondered over this a moment, then—

"I suppose you've come for a share of the remittance money," he sneered. "Well, here it is."

He counted out twenty-five sovereigns and held them toward her.

She flinched as though he had struck her in the face.

"No. Put it away, Frank. I did not come for that. I followed you to your brother's house to-night, and I heard all that was said in the library; I was listening at the window."

He grasped her firmly by the wrist.

"You won't tell any one, Mary? Swear you won't tell, or—"

"No. I won't tell. Where are you going?"

"To Kimberley, Durban — anywhere; what does it matter?"

"They'll be sure to catch you if you make for the railroad, Frank."

"What do I care, so long as I have a chance for one final spree?"

"But think of afterwards, Frank. Long months, perhaps years, in jail, without a chance to get even one little drink."

"I've thought of that, Mary. It's part of the price I must pay."

"Then go the other way, boy. Back into the hills. They'd never suspect you would go there. You can make your way over the border and live free from arrest. Free, Frank; free to do as you please."

"I'd die before I got within sight of the border, Mary. It's a long trek, three weeks or more for one who knows the way, and I don't. I'd get lost, like as not; and then the loneliness."

"I'll come with you, Frank," she pleaded. "I know the way. I've been there with my father. And listen. He struck a rich vein on his last trip. He gave me the bearings of it just before he died. We'll go prospecting, Frank—you and I."

He seemed to catch some of her fire for a moment, then came the cold waters of doubt.

"It's a dry region, Mary, and this is the dry season. A man has to know the location of the water holes to make that trip in safety. Even then there's a chance that they are dried up."

"Some I know, and I'm willing to take a chance on the others. Are you less of a man than I thought? Aren't you willing to take a chance, too?"

"How about pack mules, and grub?"

"I've already arranged for that. They are waiting outside for us now. Pete got them for me. Pete's true blue; he won't tell a soul."

He surrendered with an ill grace.

"You've got it all planned out, haven't you? You seemed damned sure I'd go," he grunted.

Mary laughed, a low, musical laugh.

"Come along, Frank," she said, "we ought to be trekking."

VII.

FEW things surpass in beauty an African sunrise. It has all the glories and none of the symbolical sadness of a sunset.

Mary, as she watched the paling of the morning star before the many colored shafts of light, pale crimson, mauve, violet, gold and silvery gray intermingling, which heralded the coming of day, found a new courage to face the task before her. Let the day bring forth what it would, courage and hope were with her now; it was the message of the rising sun.

She turned to Frank, wishing that he could share her pleasure; but he was still fast asleep beside the campfire, and she did not wake him.

Two hundred odd miles lay between them and Jonesburg. Not far, you will say. Yet, when you recollect that their pace never exceeded three miles an hour, the pace of their pack mules, and that the trail had led across a desolate waste, devoid of vegetation, waterless, save for an occasional water hole; when you consider the intense heat from which there was no respite, night or day, you will admit, perhaps, that two hundred miles in ten days represents pretty hard traveling. Nor must it be overlooked, in measuring the magnitude of the task, that one of the travelers was a man soft with years of indolent living and hard drinking; and the other a girl who, besides having the responsibility of the trip on her hands, had also to care for the man.

The first she could have done without undue exertion, for she was veldt wise. But the latter sapped her strength and vi-

talities, and at times filled her with doubt as to whether she was strong enough to see through the thing she had undertaken.

The conflict with Frank had started almost from the time they had left Jonesburg, ten weary days ago. Even then he complained that she was persuading him, against his better judgment, to suffer untold hardships, to risk dying of thirst. It was only by dint of much pleading, of the possibility of locating gold and all that entailed—unlimited whisky, and independence of the miserly remittance from home—that she had been able to hold him.

Each morning as they set out on the trail leading still farther from Jonesburg, it had been increasingly difficult to break down his avowed determination to "chuck it all and go back for one last spree." And when he did give in to her it was with a bitter sullenness which robbed Mary of the sweets of victory.

He refused to help with the animals, sulking like a spoiled child while she collected the brush for a fire, or performed the hundred and one little duties which help to make camp life comfortable.

The first few days she ignored his attitude, doing all the work uncomplainingly. She was not yet sure of her ground; she was not yet far enough away from Jonesburg, but as soon as they were among the hills, and the last landmark of the settlement lost to sight, she suggested that he help her; that he light the fire for the evening meal.

"This is your picnic," he replied with a sneer. "I didn't want to come. Well! Now you've got me here you want me to work; but I won't."

"Very well, Frank," she had replied quietly, and unrolled her blankets. "We'll go without 'scoff' to-night. But I'm awfully hungry."

Frank had watched her in wrathful silence for a while, and then, for he, too, was hungry, and a little ashamed, went in search of wood. Each day after that she had forced him, by some such trick, to help in the making and breaking of camp. And already he was showing signs of improvement physically. His face was tanned; his eyes no longer bleary. He carried him-

self more erect, and the weak lines about his mouth had almost disappeared. No man could lead the life Mary had forced him to lead and not reap some benefit, even in so short a time. And Frank had been an athlete in the beginning. Once or twice he had showed actual pride and delight in the knowledge of his return to something approaching his old-time strength and vigor.

And now, when they had almost reached the goal for which she aimed, it seemed that all her efforts were to be of no avail.

"To-morrow," he had said, when they came to this water hole, "we go back." He had said this before, many times, but never with such a note of finality in his voice, and Mary, a feeling of hopeless despair in her heart, was unable to answer him, and turned her head swiftly that he might not see the tears which came to her eyes.

"Yes," he continued, "I'm going back, do you hear? I've had enough of this damn foolishness. If I'm arrested, who loses but me? John's safe. No one will suspect him. I will confess—if a confession is needed—and I'll go to prison for it. That's my share of looking after the family honor. If I do that no one has a right to interfere with me if I want a drink. Do you think I can live through months of this? Wandering through these blasted hills, looking for gold which we will never find? I'm going back. A man has a right to live his own life."

"But what about me?" she had asked, quietly.

"You? You knew what you were doing when you married me. I didn't. I was drunk, and I wish to God I were drunk now."

VIII.

THE sleeper stirred fitfully as though about to wake, and Mary busied herself at the fire, preparing the morning meal.

"Good morning, Frank," she called cheerfully, as the other, awakened by the aroma of coffee, sat up suddenly.

He grunted a reply.

She handed him his coffee.

"You haven't forgotten what I said last night, have you?" he asked.

"No, Frank, I haven't forgotten."

"Well, I meant it."

She waited until he had dressed and finished his breakfast before she spoke again.

"Frank?"

"Well?"

"I want to tell you that your brother did not steal the money."

"What do you mean?"

She hesitated, as though realizing she had made a false move, then, having committed herself, continued:

"It was a test of you, Frank; to see if you had altogether forgotten what it was to be a man."

"I don't understand. John would have killed himself had I not prevented him. I got there just in time."

"No! That was to make it seem more real—that and the things Belle told you. It was all my plan in the beginning, but everybody helped—John, Belle, O'Brien, Pete, and the rest. I wanted to get you away from the Royal, out here on the veldt where it's clean, and give you a chance to find yourself again."

"You're not going back, Frank. I'm not going to let you. This is your chance, and you shan't throw it away. In the hills yonder is a wonderfully fertile valley, and there we shall stay as long as our provisions last—six months or more if we're careful."

"It's going to be hard, boy, but I'll help you, and you'll come through. You must, for my sake." Her voice faltered. All this time Frank had made no sign that he heard, and she felt that she could no longer endure the suspense. "You must, for my sake," she repeated. "You loved me once."

For a moment Frank seemed to be half dazed, as if he had not fully comprehended just what this meant to him.

"Blast you," he cried suddenly, in an insane rage. "So you played a trick on me, eh? You and my brother! You let me think that I was doing a brave thing; that I was saving the family honor, and all the time you were laughing at me. Well, now I'm going back and—"

He raised his hand threateningly, and she fell back with a little cry. But the cry was not of fear, rather an expression of pity.

"All right," she assented calmly, "we will go back."

IX.

THAT day Mary failed to locate water. Another day passed and still no water!

Then Frank knew what it was to really be thirsty, for, somehow, Mary had forgotten to fill the water bags. His throat was parched, his tongue swollen, his eyeballs protruded from their sockets.

When he seemed about at the point of exhaustion, reeling in his stride like a drunken man, Mary produced a small flask and handed it to him.

He unscrewed the top with feverish haste and put it to his lips.

The next moment he had dashed it despairingly to the ground.

It was water he wanted; Mary had given him whisky!

He looked at her, and the angry curses which rose to his lips found no utterance.

He saw that his suffering was no greater than hers; that she, too, was nearing the point of collapse. And then came the thought that she had willingly taken this course, had purposely failed to locate water; had dared the great thirst; had dared death, in the hope that she could persuade him from his purpose.

A feeling of shame, of unworthiness, swept over him. He wished to express contrition, to declare that he would strive to be worthy of her. But all he could say was:

"I give in, Mary. Lead the way, I'll follow your trail."

Mary turned almost at right angles from

the course they had been taking, and ten minutes later came to water.

X.

WHEN Mary awoke the following morning Frank was attempting, and not very successfully, to make some "sour cakes" for the morning meal.

"Frank," she called.

He went over at once and knelt beside her.

"I've been a cad, Mary," he said humbly. "Can you ever forgive me?"

She patted his head gently, forgivingly.

"Mary?" He hesitated a moment.

"Are you really my wife, or was that a trick, too?"

"That was no trick, Frank."

"I'm glad of that," he answered simply.

"But how dared you do it, Mary?"

"Your brother married us, Frank, and if you had not taken—as you then thought—his fault on your shoulders; if you had failed to meet the test or refused to make this trip, the record would have been destroyed. But you proved yourself then, and I was willing to take a chance on the rest."

"You shan't lose," he muttered to himself; then, as the smell of burning food came to his nostrils, he jumped up and ran over to the fire in order to save from complete ruin his batch of "sour cakes." In a little while he was back again, proudly exhibiting his first attempt at camp cooking.

The cakes were scorched to a cinder on the outside, soggy and unpalatable in the center; the coffee was bitter, but the two—the man and the girl—ate with great contentment, and in happy silence, hand in hand, they watched the rising of the sun; the beginning of a new day.



Among next week's short stories you will find a skit on the latest craze

"RADIO ROMEO." By Jack Bechdolt.

There'll be a unique love story, too, in "The House of Too Many Windows," by Charles Divine, and an engaging yarn of a sailor, "Bo Darrow, Sentimentalist," by Herman Howard Matteson.



The Fear Sway

Part IV

by *Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JENNIE LEE SHOWS FOUR ACES.

WHAT Tom Drury said to Jennie in that tense moment of silence during which the court stood immobile, like a group of statues, could be heard by every one:

"I am going to do what I said. The wrongs that were laid to my name will be righted. Marty Lingo's wife won't be weeping to-morrow as I saw her weeping down at the Lingo ranch. Your grandfather's life wish will be satisfied, and as for you, you will see your home again."

Drury backed to the window covering the mute, frozen figures.

"I'm stronger than I was before the trial, men," he shouted to them. And the three outlaws heard what he said: "You've proved me the Gila. Well and good, I am the Gila. And I have the power of the Gila behind me—which is power enough to rule this range. From now on until I've accomplished my vow, I am going to rule this range and hold sway!"

He turned and vaulted out of the window over the sombreros of the outlaws who were covering his escape. Darting across the street, he vaulted onto the back of the huge gelding.

Crater reared on his hind feet, swung around, and, feeling the spurs raking into his flanks, started down the street in his usual series of straight-away bucks. When he felt the hand of his master gathering the reins taut, he subsided into a hard gallop, and disappeared where the street swerved down around the shoulder of the first hill.

Meanwhile the three outlaws ducked behind the wall of the courthouse, and hurried for the ponies they had chosen to use in their escape. On the instant every man of the Vigilantes snapped to his holster, yanked out the gun, and stampeded for the window.

A cloud of dust, the dim silhouettes of three hunched figures and sombreros, and a wild clattering of hoofs, was the target into which they hurled a rapid and continual string of fire.

Those of the Vigilantes who had been quick enough to get horses galloped madly down the street. They had barely reached the edge of the town when the first of their number dismounted on the jump, feeling his saddle slipping around underneath the horse's belly. In another moment two more men fell, and the remaining riders, realizing that they had been tricked, jumped as their cinches began to trail on the ground and their saddles to slide.

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For a moment the posse itself scattered along the main street, some standing, some sprawled in the dust, others sitting up in the middle of the highway gazing blankly in every direction.

"Don't lose your heads just because you're losing your seats!" Gaunt yelled. "Saddle your mounts again and hop to it!"

As the men obeyed, Gaunt saw the cowboy who had been delegated to watch the horses during the trial. He was bound and gagged, lying sprawled in a doorway.

"Unbind this damned carcass and give him a horse!" Gaunt shouted. "And the rest of you birds who had your horses stole—get any mount you kin!"

Now that the chase promised to be a long one, the riders looked around for their own mounts. The fact that three of the horses had been stolen by the outlaws caused the wildest confusion. Crater himself—the fastest, the unbeatable—had been appropriated by the leading fugitive. On the other hand, Sugg's bay and the calico horse on which Drury had been brought to the mountains, were left as extra horses. These were accordingly appropriated by two of the Vigilantes. This left only one man in the street who had been too slow to grab a mount: he was Marty Lingo.

Sugg, ever since he had bolted out of the court room the moment before the holdup, was nowhere to be found. In the confusion Gaunt did not notice this, and for that matter no one else did. Gaunt's only thought was that Jennie was remaining behind, possibly alone in the town. Before he galloped off, leading his horsemen on the chase, Gaunt shouted:

"Look here, men, this won't do! The gal's being left behind!"

"Lucky for us!" one of the Vigilantes cried, "or else she'd be pulling off another one of her damned miracles!"

"I'll take care of her, chief," Marty put in. "But my horse is stole."

Another man added hurriedly: "Chief, I rode to the end of the town before my saddle slipped, and I seen three ponies tethered to the side of the hill. They're the ponies the outlaws must have rode up here on!"

The chief turned to Marty Lingo before wheeling his horse and bolting down the street:

"Marty, since you're without a mount, I want for you to look after that there gal of mine," he shouted hoarsely. "Like as not she'll be pulling off some more of her damned tricks. Further and more, I don't want for her to be left alone up here in the hills—even if she does think the Gila is in love with her."

"I'll see to her, chief!" little Marty Lingo said. "Don't worry. I'll take her down to my ranch; 'tain't far. I'll see that your little gal is took back safe. They won't no one touch her while Marty Lingo's chaperon!"

The chief galloped off, leading his posse up to the mountains with a thunder of beating hoofs.

Jennie Lee was standing in the doorway of the court room, watching the proceedings of the posse with an expression of triumphant amusement. The confusion of the last few moments, occasioned by the loss of three mounts and the loosened saddles, had delayed the chase long enough, she knew, to give Tom a big head-start. Added to this, he had the fastest horse, and there was a slim chance now of his being caught by the men who a moment before had amused themselves by giving him a mock trial.

Marty Lingo, who was halfway down the street, watched the posse stringing out into single file as it hit the mountain trail and disappeared into the upsloping cañons. Then he walked down the street toward the girl.

It was a walk of scarcely fifty yards, and yet Marty Lingo was unable to complete it. He saw the girl go back into the court room, ostensibly, he concluded, to get her sombrero and riding gloves. The moment she disappeared, a man stepped out of the doorway of the old, rickety, wind-warped dance hall adjacent. It was into this building that Henry Sugg had fled.

Marty Lingo did not know it was Sugg who stepped out. All he saw was a tall man, masked with a red bandanna, holding a black Colt forty-five. Marty did not

look into the man's eyes, which he might possibly have recognized. Instead, he gazed, hypnotized by the little white line of fire which the noon-day sun drew along the perfectly shined gun metal.

CHAPTER XIX.

GAUNT STARTS THE CHASE.

PETER GAUNT led the chase as far as the first big hill which sloped up to Mount Diablo. Here he divided his men, sending half of them about the hill to the north, and the other half to the south.

"On the other side of this hill," he explained, "we can see the cañon which cuts up to Diablo. At the entrance of the cañon we will meet."

A mile, galloping through the sagebrush and rocks, unmindful of the breakneck chase and its danger to either rider or horse, brought the leaders around the mountain. Gaunt, old as he was, had pressed his horse mercilessly through the rough growth, so that its hide as well as the rider's own khaki trousers were badly ripped. The chief ran his bright eyes across the wild simmering valley which separated the knoll, on which he stood, from the towering crags of Diablo.

He had hoped the view they now commanded would give them an easy clew to the direction the fugitives had taken. Instead, they were frustrated by a mirage which appeared at the end of the cañon, so that they seemed to be looking into a clear mountain lake on the bosom of which the mountain peaks were reflected.

"It's the hell of a place!" one of the Vigilantes said. "I don't feel much like diving into that thar lake! How do we know now but that the Gila will have his gang up and surrounding us?"

Gaunt did not answer immediately. He was waiting for the rest of the posse to gather, as he had ordered, and while waiting he was trying to formulate a plan.

"The Gila can avoid them open spaces of adobe," Gaunt heard one of his men saying. "And it's the only place we can see him definite like."

"The distance is too fur," said another Vigilante. "If he rides agin a background of sage or mesquite, you simply can't follow him."

"That's him now!" another cried.

Gaunt strained his eyes. It looked to him as if the black horse and its rider were a little ant. Three other ants were creeping along at the edge of the sky-blue water.

"It appears to me like he's goin' one direction and his shadow—which is stronger'n he is—damned if it ain't goin' the other!"

By this time the last man of the posse galloped up, his horse stumbling and beating upon the stony ground.

"Are we all here?" Gaunt asked, looking around at his men.

"Marty Lingo couldn't get a hoss," one of the men reminded him.

"I know that. I told him to take the outlaws' ponies and ride with the gal down to his ranch. But is every one else here?" The men looked around.

"Where the hell is Sugg?" Gaunt asked.

"Yes, where the hell!" others exclaimed.

"I got his horse!" one of the men laughed. "That ought to explain his—"

"But where was he when we was startin' out?"

"As I have a faint recollection durin' the trial," another man said, "Henry Sugg ducked out'n the door just before the Gila stuck us all up."

"And two of the bandits popped their noses into the door right after," another explained. "Like as not they brained Sugg."

"The gal will find him."

"And Marty Lingo's there. They'll find him."

"I'm wonderin' if he really got brained," Gaunt remarked. "And how is it he run out before any of us?"

"Any one would of run out that had a chance. And Sugg was always a quick one."

"Well, we cain't be worryin' about him, chief. Our escaped prisoner is gettin' farther and farther away. How do you want for us to go about this here man hunt?"

"Yes, the man hunt!" Gaunt replied, his face lighting up with his plan. "We'll

git back to Henry Sugg later. Now I'll tell you how we-all will play this game, men. We'll deploy here and now. Six of you ride north around Diablo, six cut straight west, followin' me. The rest of you string out for ten miles acrost the plain. That 'll bring us in a big circle and we can start closin' in. We'll circle Mount Diablo, cover the whole plain, and as we close in we'll stop up both ends of this here cañon where Drury and his outlaws are ridin'! That 'll mean they can't escape us without they try to climb the sides of the cañon and come right back to Desolation, where they started from. If they do that, we'll follow 'em back, and if we don't catch 'em by that time, I ain't fit to lead you men agin the rest of my days."

Having delivered these orders Gaunt wheeled his horse and dashed back on the trail westward as fast as his panting mount would carry him. The rest of the riders galloped off on the trails assigned to them, some dashing down the long, rocky, mesquite-covered plain, others plunging almost headlong into the cañon, and others beating across the rocks in a race to keep up with Gaunt.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GILA INTRODUCES HIMSELF.

AS the Vigilantes surmised, Henry Sugg had bolted from the court room just before the trial broke up. When he found himself outside, he was immediately confronted by one of his own outlaws who was about to hold up the Vigilantes. The giant negro into whose arms he practically fell, not knowing who he was, timed a smashing blow to his jaw. Sugg fell stunned. The hold-up was accomplished; Tom Drury had escaped, and the Vigilantes had got to horse.

When Sugg came to himself, he heard Gaunt shouting his orders to the Vigilantes to adjust their saddles and mount again for the chase.

Sugg crawled into the dance-hall adjacent to the court room, and from a window he saw that old Gaunt was giving his parting orders to Marty Lingo to take care of

the girl and to ride-with her to the Lingo ranch. Sugg also heard something else: one of the Vigilantes was telling the chief that ponies were in the little arroyo at the lower end of the town where they had been left by the outlaws.

This outcome pleased Sugg. He realized that, with the exception of little old Marty Lingo, he was alone in the town with Jennie Lee.

He tied his bandanna around his face. It was when Marty Lingo was coming back to the court room, to get Jennie, that Sugg sprang out from the dance-hall and confronted him.

The little rancher's woeful brown eyes bulged. In acting as chaperon to the chief's granddaughter he had not anticipated such a miraculously quick opposition.

He lifted his hands in obeysance to Sugg's command, and submitted to being bound without any questions whatever. Through his mind ran a confused jumble of ideas: the Gila, as he thought, had escaped in the person of Tom Drury. Who this man was, he could not guess. He was undoubtedly one of the Gila's gang, but he had nothing in common with the three unshaven grinning brutes who had held the court up. The fact that he was masked was all the more perplexing.

"Now then, Mr. Lingo," Sugg said, as he yanked off the rancher's bandanna and used it as a gag, "all you have to do is to lie down here in this dance-hall, and lie quiet. It won't be long. Sooner or later men will come into town. They'll untie your hands and feet. And then you can blab all you please. But don't tell them who I am. Don't try to think what my voice sounds like. You know what happens to men who mess too much into the Gila's business."

For a moment Marty Lingo thought that this man who talked like Henry Sugg, the suave ranch owner and highly respected Vigilante, might possibly be the Gila Monster himself.

"But no," Marty said to himself as the gag cut across his lips. "The Gila's went; he's up to Diablo by this time. *He couldn't of come back!*"

Sugg tied the little man to one of the up-

rights in a booth of the dance-hall, then stepped out into the glaring street.

He removed his bandanna from his face and walked to the door of the court room just as Jennie was coming out. Seeing him, she stepped back with a start, and they met within the threshold.

"Well, Miss Lee," he said, "it looks as if we had this town to ourselves."

Immediately she sensed the mock chivalry of his attitude, the amused triumph, the calmness that comes with the satisfaction that he had all the time, as well as all the power he wanted.

"Where is Marty Lingo?" she gasped, showing by the sudden draining of color from her cheeks that she realized the trap in which she had fallen.

"Marty Lingo is in the dance-hall next door, and I'm sure he has no intention of casting a damper on our meeting."

"Then you've—"

"No, I merely tied him up. You notice he's not screaming? I gagged him."

She backed horrified into the room. Sugg followed.

This was the room where scarcely half an hour before he had witnessed the almost perfect culmination of his carefully laid plans. If the girl had not interfered it would have been the perfect culmination. Sugg had reveled at the helplessness of his victim, his pleasure had been akin to the delight of a boy watching a fly through which he had stuck a pin.

And in this very room the girl had fought with every ounce of life and energy within her for the freedom of her lover. Her fight had succeeded. The lover was saved; and now, instead, she was in his place—as helpless as he had been. She had defeated Sugg completely in his first game, and now she found herself playing in another one just as desperate, perhaps more horribly vital. The cards she held this time were not the aces of every suit. She held nothing, her antagonist everything.

"All right, Mr. Sugg," she finally managed to say. "We have the town—as you say—to ourselves. And what are—"

"What am I going to do? I am going to protect you of course—protect you from the Gila and his desperate gang."

"I am not afraid of them—I have shown you that already. I brought the gang up here—three of them: that horrible negro, Slinkey, Driggs, and the Mexican."

"But how about the Gila himself?"

"Do you mean Tom Drury?" A slight spasm of anger thrilled her. It helped her voice.

"I thought you protested Tom Drury was not the Gila."

"You are the Gila," she said, her anger exploding itself and leaving her suddenly trembling and unnerved.

"You don't really believe Tom Drury's story."

"Of course I believe it. You are the Gila. I know it now. There is no doubt of it. You ran out of the court room when you knew Tom Drury had a gun, because you knew he would kill you. You knew perfectly well he would kill you the first chance he had—the very moment that he was free. But he will come back. If you don't look out, he will come back here. What do you think he would do if he found you here with me?"

Sugg laughed softly. The thought she suggested caused him to break out suddenly with anger:

"They would have all run out of the court room, every mother's son of them. But they were frozen with fear—and too slow. I was quicker—"

"And more afraid—"

"This is no time for you to—"

"Why did you come in here?" she cried suddenly, finding her nerve. "What are you going to do? I don't want you to ride with me! I want Marty—"

"Not Marty. I am the one you want! I am the one who will ride out across the range with you."

"The Vigilantes will find us—you do not dare—"

"To ride with you? Protecting you? The Vigilantes won't find us—not where I intend taking you—"

"You intend—taking—me—" she repeated, dazed.

"Down to a very delightful little Spanish hacienda on the other side of the mountains!" Sugg smiled graciously, chivalrously.

Jennie uttered a half choked cry and stepped to the door. She checked herself as she saw the Gila move, scarcely without taking a step, in the direction which would obstruct her path. She stood still, scarcely breathing. Her fear to step forward was much the same as the fear of a man who is followed by a big dog and who knows that to break into a run would only precipitate an assault. She found herself momentarily too terror-stricken to move.

When she faced three of the Gila's outlaws she had been brave. Sugg's most desperate henchmen, when confronting her, had failed to strike fear. But now that she faced one man—and that man Henry Sugg, who was in love with her—her bravery vanished. She breathed heavily for a moment, as if trying to drown the almost audible beating of her heart.

Then she collected her wits and spoke in a low trembling voice:

"You are playing a dangerous game. You have won your games before because they were played against men." Her voice suddenly steadied itself to a cutting softness. "Now you think you will try a new sort of game. It's one that many men have lost."

"I will not lose," he replied in a tone so polite as to seem almost placating. "I cannot lose. This range is mine, the law of it, and the lawlessness of it. Your own Vigilantes are with me, your grandfather."

"And your desperadoes?" she snapped. "Your desperadoes are with Tom Drury— And as long as Tom Drury wishes to remain an outlaw—the outlaw you have made him—as long as he desires to remain the leader of your gang, your power is gone!"

"Very well, I will stay away from him. You and I will go away together. We will ride from the range and over the hills until we come to a little abandoned ranch—"

"Together"—she repeated, horrified. "We are going together?"

"To a little ranch on the other side of Diablo," he went on. "You and I. There we will have supper to-night and no one in the world will disturb us. No one will be within miles or know that we are there. Yes," he added suddenly. "There will be one man, a little old Mexican caretaker.

You remember Domingo—little Domingo with the white beard?"

"Domingo!" the girl cried. "Then you mean—"

"Yes, I mean we are going to your own ranch. What could be more romantic? You sent this man Tom Drury into the desert to clean the country so you could go back to your home. And Tom Drury said: 'I will take her back to the home she is longing for!' But he is wrong. It is I who will take you back, and see your eyes sparkle again at the sight of your childhood haunts."

"My grandfather kept me from that country because the Gila wanted me!" she cried, drawing back and putting her hand to her holster. "If you think you will take me there I will tell you this: I would rather kill you—"

He leaped forward, pinning her arm to her side. With his right arm he reached around her waist, gripped her wrist till her hand opened in pain and the six-gun clattered to the floor. This accomplished, he stepped back again and surveyed her complacently.

Now that the first step in their conflict, a swift momentary thing, had taken place, Sugg seemed to be much more at ease. He rolled a cigarette casually and purred:

"I am glad that is over with. Our relations from now are bound to be much more amicable."

Jennie knew this. It horrified her. She was reminded of the futility of any sort of struggle by the wrenching pain of her wrist. It felt to her as if in that one easy grip Sugg had broken the little bones of her hand, and in accomplishing it he had not even allowed more than the semblance of a struggle. She stood before him, helpless.

The flies buzzed. Sugg's cigarette smoke rose in a single string toward the cob-webbed rafters.

"I heard your grandfather say that you were to ride home with Marty Lingo. Marty was to ride on one of the ponies my own men left up in the arroyo. Your pony and one of these will be our mounts. I think before nightfall we should arrive at your rancho. After that we will ride on together, across the border to Mexico!"

"The Vigilantes will find you. Tom Drury will find you!" she exclaimed desperately. "They will kill you for this."

"During our party," he replied softly, "we will let Tom and the Vigilantes chase each other into the mountains!"

"I will not go. I will die first."

He stepped closer to her, looking into her face with a steady, serious smile. Again she felt the hand on her wrist, and a shudder of helplessness went through her.

"I am not going to tie your hands," he said, "and carry you off like a brigand kidnaping a child. The journey is too long. I prefer remaining here."

"Here!"

"We have the town to ourselves. I doubt if Tom Drury would return. At least not until Peter Gaunt has give up the chase."

"No! No! I cannot remain here. The place is abhorrent to me. It is like a graveyard!" She was suddenly panic-stricken at the thought of staying another moment in the desolate ghost town. To be alone with Sugg in this town seemed to her infinitely more terrible than to be thrown with him on a desert island or into the heart of an uninhabited mountain range. The walls of the shack, echoing their words; the broad empty street, the skull-like houses with their black eyes, horrified her. "No, no! Don't bind my hands!" she repeated piteously. "I will go away from here—anywhere! Take me away from this horrible place!"

"Your own rancho, then."

She opened her mouth to again cry out in protest, but a faint ray of hope came to her. As Sugg himself had said, there would be one other person at the ranch. Old Domingo, a servant who had been in the household of Peter Gaunt in the days before the exile, would see the plight of the girl who as a child had been his mistress. At least it was better to play for time, to follow her captor, who wanted to take her from this place which had grown so abhorrent, to follow him to the scenes of her childhood. At any rate they could not be abhorrent!

Suddenly she thought, with a pounding thrill in her heart—Tom Drury was free

and riding Crater. He might by some miracle hear of the abduction.

"Take your hand away," she said. "I will ride away from here with you without resisting."

Marty Lingo had found himself so effectually gagged and bound that during the whole conversation between Sugg and Jennie he was helpless. He was, however, able to take one step toward his liberation. His hands had been tied so securely with a rawhide romal that he could not even attempt to twist them loose without cutting the flesh of his wrists. Sugg was an adept at this work, but he had overlooked one thing: the two-by-four upright to which he had tied the end of the romal, was so old and rotten that with a few jerks Marty pried it loose. This did little toward helping his escape. If anything he was worse off than ever, and the big upright fell upon his back, twisting his wrists like some medieval rack, so that he fell sprawling to the ground. To get out of the door carrying this beam was next to impossible, but one thing he was able to do.

Inch by inch he crawled out of his little booth. His wrists began to bleed, his gagged breath to give out. Yet he was determined at all odds to get away from his booth, cross that dance-hall floor and crawl to the window which opened out on the street. It was a matter, as he knew, of life and death.

When he reached the window the pain left his wrists and his back, as if some miracle had been performed upon him. He forgot his twisted spine, his torn flesh, even his choking breath. He thanked God that he had reached the sill of that window in time.

Yes, it was a matter of life and death, and his own plight was a miserable puny joke compared to the tragedy being enacted with Peter Gaunt's granddaughter as the leading character. Sugg and Jennie were at the end of their conflict just as Marty, his last ounce of strength going into a convulsive twist, crawled like a wounded worm to the edge of the dance floor.

He raised his head to the sill, and words drifted to him:

"Before nightfall we will arrive at your rancho . . . during our party . . . Mexico—"

The words trailed into the crooning unintelligible voice of Henry Sugg. But Marty had heard enough.

CHAPTER XXI.

DRURY GUNS FOR THE THREE HEADS.

EARLY afternoon found Tom Drury in the center of the cañon where Gaunt had espied him from the heights of the mountain.

As he rode the big gelding down into the long stretch of the cañon bottom, an exuberance thrilled him—the exuberance of unlimited power. The hot wet muscles of the horse's neck, the steady untiring gallop, the tremendous strength of the animal, enthused Drury, so that he felt as if its strength were part of his own body. The sudden sense of freedom and the power given into his hand converted him from a helpless, doomed man to a centaur, a centaur with the cunning of a man and the strength of a horse, against whom no one could prevail.

The tremendous, unbeatable mount whose superb muscles Tom could feel against his knees, his calves, the palm of his hand, was not the only source of inspiration; nor was that source the six-gun which he held in his hand. It was the memory of something Henry Sugg had told him when the two were on the mesa the previous day.

He had learned of the unlimited power of the Gila over this range. Sugg had pointed out that it was greater than the power of the Governor of the State, as great as the power of some old barbaric potentate who could order death according to his whims. "Until I conquer these three bandits who are following me," Tom said, "I am going to be the Gila!"

When he was well out on the long falling plain of the cañon, he drew rein and turned about, looking back on the trail he had followed from Desolation. As he glanced up at the mountains, he saw the outlaws who had helped him in his escape.

They were plunging down the trail as

fast as their horses would carry them, trying to lessen the distance which had gradually been growing between themselves and the man they supposed was their master.

Drury did not turn to give them his dust again. Part of his job, he knew, was to get these three men; and now was his chance. He also knew that he had little time to waste on them. Peter Gaunt and his posse were hot on his trail, and Drury had no desire to fall again into their clutches—at least not until they were convinced of the duplicity of Henry Sugg.

The foremost of the outlaws, Drury observed, was well in advance of the other two. The negro followed him at considerable distance, and then came the little hunched figure of Slinky Driggs. It was the Mexican's horse that had eaten up the distance between Drury and his followers. The Mexican, Andres, rode up. When he saw Drury waiting in the creek bed he slowed to a canter and at a distance of twenty feet drew rein.

"All right, you hombre!" Drury shouted. "Come over here."

The Mexican rode forward cautiously and stopped in front of his "master." For the first time Drury looked at the lithe figure and the narrow face, so swarthy as to seem almost black.

"Have you seen me before?" he snapped out.

Andres straightened up as if a sword had pierced his vitals. He detected a strange sound in the voice of this man who was supposed to be his master.

"Never without your mask, maestro."

"But you recognize me as the Gila?"

"It is not for me to recognize the Gila, maestro."

"But you call me maestro? Why the hell do you call me maestro and follow me down into this cañon, if you do not recognize me as the Gila?"

Andres seemed afraid to answer. It was an unbreakable tradition with him that the Gila's identity was supposed to be for all time a secret. His name was not to be uttered. To call him the Gila to his face would have been sacrilege.

"Answer me that!" Drury shouted. "Tell me who I am, Mex!"

"I—I do not know, maestro," Andres stammered. "The people on the range tell me you are taken prisoner. I say to myself, 'Andres, your maestro is prisoner. I will go for the rescue of my master.' I say those words to myself. The person who tells me this is one very beautiful señorita who is sweetheart to you who are my maestro. So we come for to make rescue."

"But who am I? What is my name? Why am I your master?"

"It is not for me to say your name, señor," the half-breed begged in a tone which had all the awe and horror of a medieval monk avoiding the devil.

Drury took his gun from its holster and pressed his horse over to the side of the half-breed.

"Look here, Mr. Mex, you know damn well I am not your Gila. You knew it from the very first time I opened my mouth. You ought to have known it by the way I mount a horse, by my seat in the saddle, my neck, my shoulders, my hands. And you do know it!"

The Mexican's dry, black hand was slowly moving toward the flap of his holster, and when it had come to within three inches of it Drury shot his hand out as if delivering a blow in the half-breed's solar plexus. With a quick flip he yanked out the six-gun and threw it into the mesquite.

"Now, then, Mex, I've got a little job for you. Before your two pals catch up with us I want to come to an understanding. You are to ride ahead, showing the trail directly to the cache where you bandits keep your swag. Those other two hombres will follow us, and if they come too close I'm going to watch you to see if you exchange any signs. If I see you so much as bat your eye at them I'll plug you. You get my game now, do you?"

"Yes, señor, but—"

"But what—"

"If you are not the Gila, please, señor, who the hell—"

"I'm a witch doctor from the Kickapoos," Drury announced. "I have an effigy of the Gila in wax. All I have to do is to put pins into this effigy and your gang will burn with the torments of hell!"

The half-breed's eyes bulged so that the discolored whites showed in a terror-stricken stare.

"Santa Maria! I will lead the way to the mine which is our cache, maestro, for you are indeed greater than the Gila."

Without any more remarks Andres wheeled his horse and bolted across the cañon.

Drury followed. Close on his heels, at a distance of scarcely a furlong, the nigger and Slinkey Driggs clattered after in hot pursuit.

When the warped gallows of the mine shaft first came into view Drury knew that a critical situation was at hand. If he permitted Andres to go into the mine alone there was little chance of his again presenting himself. If he followed Andres into the cache there was a great risk involved in leaving the gelding Crater outside at the mercy of the two remaining bandits.

This latter chance, however, was the lesser one, for there was as yet no indication that the nigger or Slinkey Driggs had any doubt concerning Drury's identity. The dogged manner in which they followed him led Drury to think that they still regarded him as their master. Andres alone knew the truth, and Andres must be kept in sight.

Accordingly as they rode up to the old rickety headframe which marked the shaft's opening Drury dismounted and left Crater snubbed to a dry pine bole. With drawn gun he commanded the half-breed to precede him through the brush toward the mine shaft.

Both men crawled through the thicket which completely covered the waste. They came out into the small clearing under the gallows where a few boards, partly covered with sand, served as a barrier between the jet blackness of the mine and the open day.

The nigger and Driggs galloped up the side of the hill.

The sound of their horses' hoofs, spattering pebbles, could be distinctly heard as Drury was searching the person of the half-breed for a possible concealed knife or gun. Having satisfied himself on this point, he

ordered the Mexican to precede him into the mine.

"As long as you feel this cold muzzle against the back of your neck, Mr. Mexican, it means that you're to lead the way directly down the chute to your cache."

"It is for me to light this jack-lantern, maestro," the half-breed begged when they had crawled under the boards in to a cavern of pitch darkness. "Otherwise may-be I lose footing and fall down the shaft, past a half dozen landings, and find myself in a thousand pieces down below the sump. What good is your six-gun then, señor? It will not hurt me!"

"No, but remember the effigy in wax, reminded Drury. "Dead or alive you will feel the torture of it."

The Mexican's hand trembled visibly as he lit the wick of the little lantern. Having no desire to remain in the foul darkness any longer, Drury felt greatly relieved as the interior of the slope filled suddenly with the wagging lights and shadows.

He followed his guide deep into the bowels of the earth. As he crept along between the dank old walls the darkness closed in behind him. It was an audacious move, and one which led to consequences Drury had not bargained for.

Out in the open world, which now seemed remotely distant and insignificant, Peter Gaunt and his posse were closing in on each end of the cañon. And, what was infinitely more serious, the nigger and Slinkey Driggs, who had ridden up to the tethered horses of Drury and the Mexican, were beginning to suspect and to ask each other illuminating questions.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SHAFT.

SLINKEY DRIGGES and his negro companion arrived at the collar of the shaft a moment after Drury and his guide had entered. They rode up to the waste where the gelding was snubbed, and where the Mexican's rangy, sore-backed pinto was standing obediently, unhitched, as he had been trained.

Both men dismounted, peered into the

shaft, and then turned to each other with quizzical glances.

"Do you reckon he figures on hiding in this here mine?" the negro asked.

"With the horses out in plain sight?" Slinkey Driggs shot back sarcastically.

"He's goin' in to get the swag befo' the posse gits us."

"Then I reckon we might as well wait, have a smoke, and give our cayuses a breath of air."

"I reckon we won't wait or have a smoke or nothin'," Driggs rejoined with a note in his voice which immediately arrested his companion's attention.

"Now, what the hell?"

"They's lots of hell, nigger," Slinkey replied. "If you want to know my sentiments on this here party, I'll say we got a delicate little operation to perform before we go ridin' any farther away from that thar posse. Mr. Nigger, you and I got some tall fightin' to do."

"You-all can perfo'm your own operations," the nigger rejoined. "Ah'm takin' orders from the boss-man in thar—and not from you."

"Look here, nigger, I want to ask you candid like: What do you think of this Gila of ourn—now that he's ridin' without his mask?"

"I ain't seen him too close."

"When he came flyin' out of that court room up in Desolation and bounded over for his horse, didn't you catch a good look at him?"

"No so good as I was prayin' for. He was flyin' past me too rapid. Didn't hesitate nowhere near long enough for me to paint a po'trait of him."

"And nothin' went through your mind?"

"What all are you feedin' me, Mr. Man? Nothin' ever goes through my mind. Besides, my mind was busy figurin' on how I was to git from that thar co't room door without havin' the seat of my pants singed with some hot lead."

"And as you was followin' this here Gila Monster, you didn't think of nothin'?"

"I was turnin' over in my mind somethin' he pulled off. Couldn't think of it at the time, but after it was all ended I began to chew it like a cow thinks over her

cud. It was when the Gila mounted his hoss. It 'peared to me like he pulled off somethin' a little different than he's in the habit of pullin' off. I was wonderin' about it, suh. Not serious. I ain't questionin' nothin'. No—suh!”

“Well, out with it, nigger.”

“I was give to understand that the Gila always trained his hosses so's he could mount 'em from the off side. That would prevent men from rustlin' his mounts without gettin' badly kicked. But it looked to me like he mounted that there animule from the near side like every one else does.”

“So you came to the conclusion that—”

“I didn't come to no conclusions—no, suh! Ah never comes to conclusions. I jess figgered he was in a mighty big hurry to git agoin', so he hopped the old hoss from any side which was the most convenient, suh.”

“Look here, nigger,” Slinkey Driggs said impatiently. “You're afraid to say what you know damned well. You're afraid to say that the face of this here bird we been trailin' is redder than the face of the Gila. You'd say it might be redder because of his long ride in the sun this mornin', or that it was only redder in your imagination and all that stuff. That's what you'd say. You'd be afraid to come out with the truth and admit that his teeth, his chin, his height, his seat in the saddle—everything else that we've so much as caught a glimpse of to-day—prove that he ain't the Gila, but some one else in the Gila's shoes, or rather in his hat. He's wearin' that yellow sombrero the real Gila wore last night when leadin' us on the Lin-go raid.”

“Don't laffin' at me, Mr. Man!” the negro rejoined. “I knew all this long befo' it hit that little lousy skull of yours, suh. I knowed all along we was ridin' a wild goose chase.”

“And what's more,” Slinkey Driggs put in, “if we stay here and argue, that thar posse will be gallopin' down on us from both ends of the cañon, then where'll we be at?”

“Hop to the trail, now, that's what I'm argufyin',” the negro protested. “I don't

care who this two-gun gen'leman is. Hop to it, and let's go!”

“And let this fourflusher get all our money?” Driggs cried, disgustedly.

“But how about the Mex? He can protect our swag.”

“Like as not this fourflusher has the Mex under his thumb. For all we know he broke him when he stopped halfway up the cañon and we saw him havin' that con-flab. If the Mex is broke, he's got a fat chance fightin'! This is what I figure is happenin' down there right now; the Mex is showin' the fourflusher where the swag is, and maybe right now the Mex is gettin' his throat cut. In another moment the crook will come boltin' out of that thar mine smilin' and still pretendin' he's the Gila.”

“Brain him when he comes out,” the negro advised.

“Better than that, plug him.”

“You plug him. He might be too quick a draw for me.”

“He might be too quick for me myself out here in the open,” Driggs reflected. “The safest and surest way to play this game is for you to jump on his back, pinnin' his arms so's he can't draw; then I'll meet him face to face and finish him.”

“That's all right fo' you, Mistah Man, but—”

“To make it absolutely safe so's you can jump him without no danger to your own carcass, we'll go inside the mine and hide in the first air passage, and then you drop on him just as he passes.”

“And where do you drop, Mr. Driggs?”

“In front of him and throw on him.”

“All right, suh; but when I pins him with my arms don't you-all be out pickin' flowers.”

Drury had noticed that same air passage when he entered the mine. And, as he followed the Mexican down the long gangway, he did not forget the fact that the nigger and Slinkey Driggs were outside under the gallows of the mine. He concluded that they would either wait for him or follow him into the shaft. In either case he must remember their existence, and be prepared for the eventuality that they sus-

pected him. If they suspected him at the very time when he was appropriating their booty, he realized that there would be a finish fight.

With this danger hovering over him, he followed the Mexican as far as the first overhead stoep. A chute led down to the tunnel in which they were walking. Into this cavity the Mexican crawled.

Drury followed and soon found himself in the small, almost airless cave, which was all that remained of a breathing space between the highly piled waste and the roof of the stoep. Choked airways and the suffocating oil lamp made this little hole untenable, except for a moment. The Mexican showed Drury two black suit cases, which he affirmed were filled with the booty of the last few raids.

Returning to the level below, by way of the chute, Drury shot off the locks of the suit cases, and examined their contents. It was a hodgepodge of worthless paper, of bills, old gold watches, and several bits of jewelry. These latter specimens had probably been hidden, Drury argued, because of the danger of trying to dispose of them too soon after the robbery. Fifty-dollar bills, he noted, were probably a part of the money recently looted from the Lingo ranch.

He had no time to assort this booty. Much of it, he knew, was valuable; much of it trash. He decided to take both of the little black satchels with him, and, accordingly, he ordered the Mexican to carry them. They would at least make a sudden attack on his part very awkward.

"We will go back to our mounts, now," Drury ordered. "Your two companions will be waiting for us, and, remember, when you see them, do not put the suit cases down. Do not speak to them. In your mind—you are to understand—I am still the Gila."

The Mexican led the way again to the end of the tunnel. It was when the first little shining aperture of the opening came into view, that Drury remembered the air passages overhead and the chances they afforded for a sudden onslaught.

An ironical thought came into his mind. The hat he was wearing had been used

against him as an irrefutable argument that he was the man who had raided Marty Lingo's ranch. It would be a turn of the tables of the most soul-satisfying justice to use this very hat as a weapon against the Gila's gang.

Tom Drury called the Mexican back to him.

"You take this lantern, Mex, and give me one of the suit cases. It occurs to me that I would rather have you in the light and remain in the dark myself, while we are approaching the end of this incline." The Mexican sullenly obeyed. "And furthermore, Mr. Mex, there may be men hiding in the air passages above who, in looking directly down on me, can see little else but this sombrero of mine. If some one else was to have his head underneath this sombrero, aside from myself, it would take a big load off my mind. So you do me that little favor, Mex. And don't look upward while you're walking. Walk like a soldier—eyes front and chin in."

"Please, maestro, I will do anything you ask—I will kiss your boots, but do not make me wear your hat!"

"Always remember that I'm behind you with this six-gun and the trigger cocked," Drury replied. "If you tilt your head upward, you will keep on tilting it till it hits the floor of this tunnel."

Doggedly the Mexican obeyed. By his cautious advance toward the mouth of the tunnel, Drury knew that the outlaw had an inkling of the trap into which he was walking.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DRURY'S RETURN.

THE situation had turned in the twinkling of an eye. Drury, instead of plunging headlong into almost certain disaster, found himself possessed of the most important advantage ever desired in any sort of a combat. That was the advantage of light.

The Mexican, whom he was using as his foil, walked ahead, carrying the little circle of light with him. Drury remained far enough behind to be completely concealed

in the dark, and yet near enough to see every movement the Mexican made.

Slinkey Driggs and the nigger, on the other hand, although in the dark, could only see the top of the Mexican's hat when the latter passed underneath the air shaft. Drury had still another advantage: in following the Mexican into the mine, his eyes had dilated to the dark, and he could accurately see what was going on; whereas Driggs and the nigger, who had just slunk in out of the sunshine, found themselves in confusing darkness.

While passing under the shaft the Mexican's sensations had so overpowered him as to make him seem almost like a sleep-walker. He expected to draw fire from above. He knew that by merely tilting his head, or calling, he could warn his companions of the trick being played upon them. At the same time he expected a bullet from the black depths of the tunnel behind him.

This nightmare of conflicting fears did not last long—nor did his punishment. His death was swift. It came, not from the hand of Tom Drury, but from little Slinkey Driggs, who bided his time and played his game in a way absolutely safe—for him.

Drury saw the streak of pale red light flashing from the air shaft, heard the almost deafening crack of the gun reverberate through the tunnel, and saw Andres, the Mexican, sink to his knees.

The huge figure of the negro dropped down from the shaft opening. He blotted out the light of the outside world. At the same time the jack-lantern, which had dropped from Andres's hand, rolled and flickered out.

"It's the Mex!" the negro shouted, just as Slinkey Driggs dropped cautiously down from the opening.

Without waiting to identify the body of the man he had killed, Driggs intuitively jumped to the conclusion that Drury was behind him in the dark. He whirled and emptied his revolver into the depths of the tunnel.

The negro, awakening slowly to the danger of his situation, turned panic-stricken and scurried toward the light of day.

Drury could see every move of this game.

When Slinkey fired in his direction, the shots whizzed past, ricocheting against the rocky ground of the tunnel and splintering the timbers overhead and on both sides. One shot was all Drury needed to silence this fire.

He aimed at the little glinting weapon which was belching its sharp streaks of light from Slinkey's hand. Slinkey dropped the gun, clutched his arm, and turned, stumbling toward the opening of the mine.

Drury followed, hurdling over the prostrate form of the Mexican. He dashed past Slinkey Driggs to the tunnel opening.

The negro had vaulted over the thicket-covered waste and was running for his horse. Drury shouted to him to hold up his hands.

The negro at first disobeyed, thinking that he could reach the shelter afforded by the horses. A bullet, whistling past his head, changed his mind, and he turned, holding up his huge trembling paws, pleading:

"Don't shoot, Mr. Boss-man. I ain't done nothin'. It was Slinkey fired at yuh, Mr. Boss-man! I ain't done nothin'!"

"Come back here. I've got some work for you, nigger," Drury commanded.

The negro advanced, and, after being disarmed, followed Drury to the mine opening.

"Bandage up that bird's arm," Drury said, "while I take a look at the Mex."

The negro obeyed, tearing off a strip of Slinkey's shirt.

"He's got us, nigger," Slinkey said. "But I'll tell you this. My left arm is still good—and I'm goin' to use it the first chance I git."

"I ain't lookin' for no mo' arguments," the negro said. "From now on I'm peaceful—until this white trash gits bumped off by our chief. Wait till the chief hears of this!"

Drury kept the two men in sight as he walked into the darkness of the tunnel. He returned a moment later and ordered the negro to help Slinkey to a saddle. The black giant picked up Driggs and mounted his horse with the ease of a man carrying a child.

Drury regarded the whole episode as a

miserable little squabble that had little to do with his great purpose. The man he was after was Henry Sugg. These three henchmen of the Gila were scarcely worth the trouble of hanging.

In fact, now that his fight was over, Drury suddenly awoke to the seriousness of the situation in which he found himself. In the fight there had been shooting. One shot had been fired in the open. The sound, reverberating through the silent cañon, could be heard sharp and clear in the thin mountain air for miles. It was that shot which gave Peter Gaunt and his posse the clue by which they ultimately trailed their fugitive.

Drury looked at the southern end of the cañon and saw a small cloud of dust slowly moving toward him. To the north, at the opposite end, was another cloud coming steadily downward.

It was plain to be seen that Peter Gaunt had cast his net with skill. At the lower end of the cañon a string of riders, presently visible, completely blocked an escape. It was also obvious that Gaunt had divided his men, and a long ride back through the cañon to the upper end would undoubtedly result in meeting another group.

While debating with himself which trail would now be the safest, Drury thought of the little ghost town which had been his starting point. It occurred to him that Jennie Lee would scarcely join her grandfather's posse in its hunt. This being the case, Tom wondered what Jennie Lee would do. Would her grandfather leave her there alone? Would Henry Sugg follow with the posse, or would he take this first chance he had ever had to carry off Jennie? Would the girl be safe in riding back to the city of Cattleoe, or to the ranch of Marty Lingo, alone?

These thoughts beset Tom as he frantically tried to arrive at a definite decision regarding his flight. The only way he could satisfy himself about Jennie's safety was actually to return to the town from which he had escaped. Furthermore, the only move that Gaunt had left him was to cut up across the little range by mounting the bluffs which formed the eastern side of the cañon. The fact that he had two pris-

oners—and both mounted on one horse—made this move an absolute necessity.

"All right, Mr. Nigger," Drury said. "You will lead the way up those bluffs, and if you don't want the Vigilantes to catch us and shoot us on sight I advise you to pick out a fast trail."

A canter along the gradual rise at the base of the cañon's side, through patches of black sage and bearbrush, brought the fugitives to a series of steps. The horses then scrambled up a trail of lava, overlain by broken rock and volcanic cinders. This led to a dizzy ledge where the crags of sandy shales fell off to the gulch below in an almost horizontal wall of brilliantly colored, rain-painted rocks.

The steaming horses pawed their way up a still steeper rise of sand until they gained the flat ground. A mile's heavy loping across this divide brought them to the eastern slope, where, after tearing through big patches of brush, they came again within view of the little old ghost town.

Drury estimated that if he could rid himself of his prisoners, without actually giving them up, he could escape from the town on Crater, this time without giving the exhausted pursuers a chance to capture him.

He urged on the nigger with oaths and galloped at the very heels of the mount which was carrying the two prisoners. In another half hour, while his pursuers were starting on the difficult trail up the side of the cañon, he galloped down the apparently deserted main street of Desolation.

When opposite the dance hall he heard the muffled sound of a man calling for help.

He ordered his prisoners to dismount and walk before him. Then he entered the old rickety building, where, as he had expected, he found a man bound and gagged.

He replaced the revolver in his holster, and went to Marty Lingo, who had lain helpless in his bonds of rawhide romal. When the bandanna which had been gagging him was untied he turned his face to Drury and gasped, partly in astonishment, and partly from the delight of breathing freely again.

"Well, free my hands, dammit!" Marty cried.

"Why should I free your hands, Mr. Lingo—and let you put up a fight? If I have still another enemy to take care of, these two prisoners of mine might take it into their heads to start another riot."

"Then these men are prisoners?" Marty exclaimed, his mournful brown eyes bulging.

"Take a look at their holsters. You see the unbuttoned flaps? You see that fox there with the bleeding arm? They are the men who raided your ranch, Marty. Their leader is Henry Sugg—"

"I know it! I know everything. Loosen my hands and I will tell you. I'm fighting for you, Tom Drury, not for these coyotes. I know the whole truth. You are not the Gila, but Tom Drury. For God's sake, free me! This rawhide has my wrists nearly sawed off! Dammit, let me tell you everything."

Drury burst into a laugh and knelt down behind the little rancher, cutting the romals until the gnarled old hands were free.

Marty finished the job by freeing his own legs.

"Drury, you've done a good job!" he said when he got to his feet. "These men are two of the three henchmen who aided the Gila in all his dastardly jobs for the last five years."

"The third is dead," Drury announced. "He was bumped off down in the cañon while I took these two men prisoners."

"Then the gang will be cleaned out—if you get the Gila himself," Marty cried.

"You don't believe I am the Gila, according to those words?"

"Hell, no! I said I know who you are. You're Tom Drury. And you've had the orneriest trick played on you that the Gila ever played on anybody on this here range. Henry Sugg, he's the two-faced, shag-gutted crook, and I know it! I believe it! Lookee here, Tom, you and me has got a big job on our hands."

"Peter Gaunt left me here in town for to look after his gal, and I no sooner started back for the court room to get the gal than Henry Sugg steps out and sticks me up.

He was masked, but I heard his voice later. I heard him talking to—"

"Where's the girl now?" Tom cried, suddenly sensing the fearful truth.

"Where is she? You're askin' me the right question thar, Tom. And I'll tell you the answer! She's with Sugg! He talked with her in that thar room next to this dance hall, and I know there was fightin'. I couldn't hear much, only one other thing just before they come out and passed by this here window.

"The damned two-gun man said he was going to take her to her grandfather's rancho. Can you beat that? Kidnaping the gal right under the very nose of me, Marty Lingo, who was set to be her chaperon! I'll smash the old double-dyed seed-wart so's he ain't fit for nothin' but tamale meat! Damned if I won't! Just let me git a horse and ride!"

"You can't get a horse and ride, Marty," Drury replied hurriedly. "You are going to stay here and watch these two men. You can chaperon 'em down to your ranch if you want. But you will be responsible for them. I am the one who is going down to the Gaunt ranch to get the Gila. Now that I have a gun, and Crater to carry me, I'm going to ride all over hell until I get Sugg face to face."

"I got a grievance of my own!" Marty objected. "I'm goin' down there to pot him!"

The distant clatter of hoofs broke in sharply upon the argument. Drury turned partly to the window.

"The Vigilantes are coming into town again!" he cried. "Marty, you deliver these men to them. Tell his honor the judge where I've gone. I have no time now to prove to that bunch of boneheads that I'm not the Gila. They'll be wanting to stage another trial. Tell his honor that I've gone for his granddaughter—that I'm going to get her—"

"And the Gila!" Marty shouted. "The damned shag-gutted—"

But Tom had jumped through the window. Vaulting to the back of his horse, he sped to the hills just as the Vigilantes galloped down the main street of the town.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



Boxed Boodle

by

Lemuel L. DeBra

"A MILLION dollars!"

"A million dollars in your American money," declared Juan Garcia. "And eet ees mine. The gringo ees dead. I do not know how nor where he got eet. I am going to geef eet all to you. Listen."

Garcia lowered his voice so it would not carry to the other prisoners milling restlessly about in the small promenade of the San Francisco jail. Richard Q. moved closer to the dying man, but he remained silent.

Garcia continued. While an officer in the Mexican army stationed near Tia Juana he had befriended a Yankee who had fled across the border. Just why the Yankee preferred Mexico to his own country, Garcia, being an officer and a gentleman, had not inquired. The gringo died soon afterward from a neglected bullet wound. He had left a certain mysterious package. Garcia opened it. It contained a million dollars in greenbacks.

"Juan," said Richard Q. gently, "you're a bit feverish to-day, aren't you? You'd better be quiet and—"

Garcia waved a silencing hand.

"The money ees of no use to me. I am the same as dead. You listen: I knew I could not keep all that money in Mexico. My friends would stick a knife in my back and rob me. So I brought it across the border one night and came to San Francisco. I buried it."

"Why didn't you put it in a bank?"

Garcia rolled his fever-bright eyes.

"Then what would your police do to me, eh? A Mexican putting a million dollars American money in the bank! I knew I had to be ver' careful. I wanted to be far from the police. So I looked for a house. You see, a man wit' a million dollars can get married, eh?"

"Well, if he got a saving woman he might get by," smiled Dick. "But go on!"

"I found a house out by the ocean. I put the money in a box and buried it at night—in the sand—back of the house—under a little tree. Then I came downtown to eat and drink. I remember fighting—"

Garcia managed an eloquent shrug.

"What was the number of the house, Juan?"

"I forgot." Garcia's voice was growing weaker. "But eet ees on Seaview Avenue, a block and a half from the park car line—about the middle of the block—house still vacant. I had to take six months' lease."

Dick knew the location. It was a string of summer cottages, vacant during the winter, greatly in demand during summer. By this time they would all be occupied—all except the one Garcia had leased. Back of the house—a little tree.

A simple matter—if there was anything to the Mexican's story. Dick consumed half a cigarette in hesitation, and looked up

to find Garcia tendering him a key. It was an ordinary flat doorkey; but it seemed to be tangible evidence that the Mexican was telling the truth.

Dick had no sooner put the key in his pocket than Garcia appeared to regret his hasty display of confidence and generosity. Perhaps, after all, he might get well. "If I do I'll hunt you up," he half promised—and half threatened.

II.

Just why Richard Q. Mandeville, only son of the California multimillionaire oil king, happened to be serving thirty days in jail has nothing to do with this story; besides, when a judge has six children and no automobiles, one must try to be charitable.

Richard Q. had found the world so full of a number of things that he never took any of them seriously. He looked on his "thirty days" as more or less of a lark. His fellow prisoners interested him tremendously—especially Juan Garcia. Dick had taken to the queer old Mexican the first day.

Garcia spoke something he thought was English, and Dick spoke something his college professor had assured him was Spanish. Since neither was ever quite sure what the other was saying they got along famously.

On the last day of Richard Q.'s sentence Garcia had sent for him. For a week Garcia had been very sick. A fever that baffled the prison physician seemed to have taken deadly grip on the old Mexican. He declared he was dying; that he hadn't a friend in all North America, save Dick; and that he was going to make him a present of a million dollars.

And then he told that strange tale of the wounded Yankee, the vacant house at the beach, the little tree, and the buried million. Had it not been for that door key—But that's where the girl comes in!

III.

WHEN one has been in jail thirty days one finds much to do on the first day of

freedom. Dick discovered many tasks that to him appeared more important for the moment than the search for Garcia's million; and it was late the following afternoon before he turned his car off Lincoln Way into Seaview Avenue and began looking for a vacant house in the middle of the block. It was a bright afternoon—flowers everywhere, children playing in the sand, girls in summery dresses, the old ocean booming sleepily, tradesmen going about their prosaic task of delivering pies and pickles.

"And I'm out here looking for a million dollars beneath a little tree!" muttered Dick. "I ought to be back in jail!"

He drove slowly past the second block of houses. The entire block was owned by Abner Westwick, an old skinflint who, to save expenses, had every house built after the same plan and painted alike. Tenants had to watch their step to keep from straying into their neighbor's yard. About in the middle of the block was a house bearing the sign:

Select Board and Rooms

\$25 per Week

A girl in a white frock sat on the porch reading a magazine. Dick passed and re-passed so often he saw people were beginning to stare at him. Then he took a spin through the beach section, and came back to where the girl sat on the porch.

This was the block. There was no mistake about that. But not one of the houses was vacant. If Juan Garcia had ever leased one it had since been occupied. Now, Richard Q., like his father, was one of those rare souls who thrive on obstacles. Never before had he hunted for a million dollars beneath a little tree. He was not going to be turned back now by a boarding house with a girl on the front porch.

If the truth was in Garcia one of these houses had a little tree in the back yard with a million dollars buried in the sand beneath it. But which house? Several of them were "about in the middle of the block"—three at least.

Dick thought of the key, but with every house occupied the key was not much help.

He couldn't sneak around after dark from house to house trying the key in people's doors.

No young man just out of jail would think of such a thing!

Thoughtfully Richard Q. drove back to town. He reached his apartments and a decision at the same time.

IV.

EARLY the following day Richard Q., handbag in hand, strolled down Seaview Avenue looking for the house with the sign. It was an infernal nuisance—this idea of having every house alike. "Ought to be this one," Dick complained aloud. "No. Wrong again. Next one surely. Ah!"

A girl in a summery dress; the sunshine in her hair, and proud of it; the dahlias in her arms jealous of the roses in her cheeks. She observes young man at gate looking at her, turns slowly, strolls toward the house. A dahlia slips reluctantly from her arms to the walk.

Just so!

Richard Q. picked up the dahlia. He put his bag on the porch and doffed his hat.

"How do you do? I believe you dropped one of your begonias."

The girl laughed—a girlish, mischievous laugh. She accepted the dahlia.

"Thank you, sir; but they're not begonias. They're—sweet Williams."

Dick unleashed another smile.

"Very stupid of me, I'm sure." He sat down on the porch step. "Where—where can I find the landlady, please? You see, I saw the sign 'Select Board and Rooms.' I want to select some."

Another laugh—just like the girl: not one false note.

"Oh, very well; what can I do for you, sir?" she asked. "You are looking at the proprietor right now."

Dick took a long breath. This girl did not look a bit like the conventional landlady; but women were doing such odd things these days. Moreover, this girl at present appeared very businesslike.

She was appraising Dick very coolly and very thoroughly.

"Well," Richard Q. began uncertainly, "may I ask your rates?"

"Thirty dollars."

Thirty dollars! The sign gave the rate as twenty-five. Not that Dick cared a hang about the cost; but she said it so easily. Just like the judge had said "Thirty days."

Dick handed over the thirty, and the girl turned to a small writing table.

"What is the name, please?"

"Richard — er — that is — George E. Richards."

The girl bowed her pretty head and wrote rapidly. She tore out the receipt and handed it to Richard Q. He glanced at it, and winced.

It was made out to "Georgie Richards."

Well, two could play at that game.

Dick looked down at the signature on the receipt. "Susan Bernice Ware!" he exclaimed. "What a pretty name! What a comfortable, affectionate name!"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Susan Bernice Ware. "Have you references?"

"Eh? References? Oh, yes. Yes, indeed, Miss Ware." Dick began fumbling through his pockets. The nerve of this landlady! "I'm afraid I left my references in my trunk, Miss Ware. You, see, they are—rather bulky."

"You may bring them later. But please do not forget. Now, Mr. Richards, where have you been the past thirty days?"

"I beg pardon?"

"I say, where have you been the past thirty days? You see, I must telephone to your last place of residence and inquire as to your character and conduct. Of course, you know that is customary."

"Oh, yes! Yes, indeed, Miss Ware. But—er—you see, I have been living in Los Angeles."

"In Los Angeles! My brother is there now. He writes that he'd rather be in jail."

"I'd rather be in Los Angeles," rejoined Dick promptly.

Susan arose. For a moment she seemed puzzled over something.

"Well," she said finally, "would you mind waiting here while I have your room prepared?"

She left without waiting for reply, and Dick registered a tremendous sigh of relief. After all, the inquisition might have been worse.

Presently Richard Q. strolled to the fence by the dahlias. For a distance of nearly thirty feet the fence was ablaze with the flowers. Then a voice—he knew at once it was Susan's—caused him to look up. He saw he stood beneath an upstairs window. To avoid being an eavesdropper he started back toward the porch; but what he heard brought him up short.

" . . . But, mamma dear, listen! I did it just for a lark. He could stay in Brother Bob's room, you know; but of course he'll leave as soon as—"

The rest was drowned in a gale of laughter, but Dick had heard enough. He stepped back and looked up at the front of the house. Nothing there. He flung a swift look at the house across the dahlia-bordered fence.

There, swinging in the breeze, was the sign, "Select Board and Rooms."

Richard Q. pursed his lips in a long-drawn whistle. He had seen the siren and had promptly forgotten the sign. Beyond the dahlias lay the boarding house—the house behind which Dick hoped to find the little tree and the hidden million.

Dick was peeved. Not because he had made a mistake; with the houses all alike, the mistake was quite a natural one. He was peeved because the girl with the laughing eyes had been laughing at him. She had known at once that he had turned into the wrong yard. How she would laugh when he confessed his mistake and passed out of the picture!

"H-m!" mused the son of the pioneer oil king. "Well, maybe!"

He went back to the porch—and sat down.

Susan returned presently. With her was a sweet-faced little woman in a dark dress softened with deft touches of old Spanish lace. Her eyes were serious but gentle. Dick liked her on sight.

"Mr. Richards—my mother."

"Mrs. Ware, I'm delighted. You have a wonderful place here. I like it already."

Mrs. Ware smiled. She started to say

something, hesitated, and looked around at Susan in perplexity.

"Now, now, Mrs. Ware, don't you bother about any apologies," Dick hastened to say. "I know you're afraid the coffee is wretched, and the steak is done to death, 'n' everything. Just like my mother. She used to—"

"But, Mr. Richards, I want to explain that—"

"That you're just opening here, and everything isn't quite all you hope to make it later. Yes, I know. But it's all right with *me*, Mrs. Ware. I'll be perfectly happy just to sit here on the porch and listen to the booming of the surf and watch the budding begonias and—"

Dick broke off to look around at Susan. How stunning she was with that "Merry Christmas" look on her face!

"Don't bother with apologies, mother," said Susan. "Mr. Richards, being a man, is impatient for his luncheon."

"Very well," concluded Mrs. Ware, a bit reluctantly. "Lunch will be ready in a half hour. Mr. Richards, I'll show you to your room."

V.

THE lunch, as Dick had feared from previous experiences at doe parties, consisted of salad, sponge cake, tea, and conversation. He liked the conversation.

"We just love it out here," said Mrs. Ware. "We never grow weary of the sea."

"It's so romantic," Susan chimed in. "The charging sea, the eternal stars, the shifting sands!"

"I'd like the sand better if it didn't shift quite so often," remarked Dick soberly. "But it is romantic. Like pirates. And buried treasure. I just wonder if there isn't some vast treasure hidden somewhere in these shifting sands, eh?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," Susan's mother said quietly. "In fact, we know there is something buried beneath—"

"Mamma!"

Dick did not trust himself to look up. So they knew, eh? Could it be possible? Mrs. Ware must have had something else in mind. Still, why had Susan stopped her from telling it? Mighty queer!

Lunch over, Dick found a chance to go upstairs and make his way to the rear balcony. He had observed this balcony when Mrs. Ware showed him his room, but had no chance to explore it then. From this balcony Dick believed he could see into the back yard of the boarding house.

He found that a roll awning had been let down to shut out the morning sun; but there was no awning at either end. Dick looked into the yard back of the boarding house. Yes, there it was. A little tree!

This was progress; but as he wondered how he'd get a chance to explore the sand beneath that little tree his gaze wandered across to the next yard. And there was another!

Dick swung around and looked down into the yard adjoining the Wares on the other side. There, too, was a small tree. Half amused, half disgusted, he lifted the awning and looked down into the yard back of Mrs. Ware's cottage. There was another tree.

"Four little trees in four different yards, and all about in the middle of the block! Huh! I'll need a gang of men and a steam shovel and—"

There were voices in the hall. "Just let things run along, mamma. We'll surely get a maid to-day. And we do need a man in the house until Bob gets back."

Dick coughed warningly.

"Oh!" Mrs. Ware was pleasantly surprised. "Mr. Richards, there isn't much of a view from this part of the house, but—"

"There's plenty, I assure you," Dick smiled. "Lots of trees 'n' everything. By the way, Mrs. Ware, I'll be taking dinner downtown this evening. I may be rather late getting back."

"Well," said Mrs. Ware, "if you come back before ten o'clock we'll be at the beach; if you come much later than that we'll be asleep. You had better take this." And she handed him a key.

Dick took the key. As he thrust it into a vest pocket his fingers came into contact with another key—one which he had almost forgotten—the key Juan Garcia had given him.

Richard Q. drew out the two keys and fitted them together. They were mates!

VI.

JAIL life leads one to note many things not observed ordinarily by inhabitants of the land of midnight suppers. From observations made through a certain barred window, Dick knew that the moon was due to rise that night at about nine o'clock. Accordingly, he made all his preparations and returned to the Ware cottage at exactly a quarter to nine. He tried both keys, found that either fitted, and went up to his room, assured that this was the house Garcia had leased, and behind which he had buried his million in greenbacks.

Drawing the shades carefully, Dick turned on the light and unwrapped the spade he had brought. Then he drew his cap low over his eyes—all night prowlers wear them so—and went out into the hall. Although the house was apparently deserted, he had decided he would not venture downstairs again. It would be a simple matter, he reasoned, to climb over the balcony rail and drop to the sand beneath.

On the rear porch Dick found that the awning was up. In the east a full moon was rising. He began climbing over the baluster.

Suddenly, below him, Dick heard a stealthy step—a low *swish, swish, swish*. Looking down he saw the shadowy figure of a woman. She had stepped off the walk and was looking at the sand like a girl hunting a four-leafed clover. Presently she passed into the shadows of the little tree. A low exultant exclamation floated up to the man on the balcony.

Standing on the nosing, Dick grasped one of the uprights of the baluster and leaned far out. The girl was on her knees in the sand. She was passing her hand over the sand—*searchingly*.

Of a sudden Dick felt the baluster giving. He tried to save himself; but two hundred pounds suspended on a two-inch baluster was too much. Richard Q. Mandeville struck the sand directly in front of the kneeling girl. His position on arrival at destination was more expressive than

elegant. His greeting, being entirely involuntary, was a monosyllabic aspirate. Under the circumstances no lady would take offense.

Of course the girl screamed. She sprang to her feet and was gone before Dick could speak—gone, as the novelists say—"with a wild, sobbing cry into the night!"

In the back yard of the boarding house a dog started an uproar. Somewhere a window was raised. A woman's voice shrilled above the barking: "Murder! Thieves! Murder!"

As Dick struggled to his feet, something white, lying on the sand, caught his eye. He picked it up. It was a girl's handkerchief. He thrust it in his pocket, grabbed the spade which had followed him off the balcony, ran around to the front door, and back up to his room.

There Dick examined the handkerchief. It was a dainty, half-grown thing, faintly perfumed. In one corner were the initials: "S. W."

"Susan Ware!" groaned Richard Q. "I thought so! But what does it mean? If they know about Garcia's million, why haven't they dug it up before this? Ah, to the devil with Garcia and his greenbacks! I'd rather go back to jail than frighten Miss Ware that way again. Of course she'll know it was her star boarder who fell off the porch. Wait until she sees me in the morning!"

He found her in the morning by the fence of dahlias, and handed her the handkerchief.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ware. I owe you an apology. And an explanation."

Susan took the handkerchief, looked at it, then up at Richard Q. "Yes?" The tone was cool, but it encouraged further confession.

"Of course," Dick went on lamely, "you knew it was I who fell off the back porch last night almost into your lap?"

"Oh, was it? Well! What were you doing there? Are you a porch climber?"

"I'll explain that," Dick hedged; "but I want you to know I'm sorry I frightened you."

"Very well," concluded Susan Bernice Ware nonchalantly; "the maid said noth-

ing about the matter. I'll give her the handkerchief with you!"

"The maid?"

"Yes. Sarah West is her name. She came yesterday just after you left. She went to the beach with us last evening, but came back to get a wrap. She is quite a stunning girl, I admit; but you—you fell for her rather easily, didn't you?" And with that, Miss Ware turned on her French heels and went into the house.

Richard Q. registered two hundred feet of blank amazement. He returned to the porch and dropped into a chair. This was what the governor would call "striking a new gusher." That girl was the maid, eh? Rather an unusual maid! Came back after a wrap, did she? Uhuh! Went pawing around beneath that little tree; that's what she did! Good Heavens! Did every one in North America know about that hidden million?

Under the circumstances Dick could not help feeling more interest in the maid than in the breakfast. And when he saw her! It was as she stepped into the breakfast room with the coffee. Their eyes met. Dick gasped. The "maid" stopped short, stared at Dick, then turned right around and fled back to the kitchen.

Sarah West, indeed! The maid was none other than Sarah Westwick, sister of Abner Westwick, the old skinflint who owned this string of cottages. She had servants in her own home. And here she was acting as a maid in the house of the hidden million!

There was only one conclusion. In some way Abner Westwick had learned Garcia's secret. Perhaps Garcia had left papers in the house that betrayed him. Perhaps, in the two days since Dick had left jail, the Mexican had told others of his treasure. The way Miss Westwick had searched the sand beneath that little tree might have been mere coincidence; but it looked more like certain knowledge.

Back in his room again, Dick sat down by the window and waited. He felt certain that as soon as possible Miss Westwick would ask for an hour off. She would hasten to her brother, tell him that she had been recognized by Richard Q. Mandeville,

who was boarding there under an assumed name. About that same time Susan and her mother would go to the beach for their morning stroll. Once more the way would be clear:

So it happened. When Dick saw Miss Westwick turn toward the car line, and Susan and Mrs. Ware go toward the beach, he got out his spade, went downstairs, and out through the kitchen door.

On one side of the tree the sand had not been disturbed since the last rain. On the other side it showed marks of Miss Westwick's searching and Richard Q.'s fall. There Dick began digging.

Perhaps fifteen inches beneath the surface the spade struck a wooden box. It was about eighteen inches long, six by six. Dick flung the spade aside, grabbed the box, and hastened into the house.

He was in the front hall when it dawned on him that it wouldn't do to have Susan and her mother return unexpectedly and find the spade and the signs of digging. Promptly he slipped the box beneath the hall seat and hastened out to the back yard. He was patting down the last shovelful of sand when he heard footsteps on the walk.

"Mr. Mandeville! What on earth are you doing?"

Dick swung around. It was Susan and her mother!

"Say!" gasped Richard Q. "What did you call me?"

Susan made a gesture of annoyance. "I didn't intend to give it away," she smiled; "but I've known you all the time. I saw your picture in the papers—about thirty days ago. And now, sir," she went on with mock gravity, "what does this mean? You—an ex-convict—coming here under an assumed name, and surreptitiously digging holes in our back yard."

"I'll tell you, Miss Ware, of course," Dick managed to reply. "Been wanting to tell you all the time. I'll do better. I'll give you half of it. Come on!"

He led the way to the front hall, and reached beneath the hall seat.

The box was gone!

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Susan. "Did you dig up a box? If you did, I'll thank you to put it back. I

buried that box there myself. It contains my poor—little—dead—canary."

Richard Q. sat down.

"And if any one has taken that box from where you put it, it was Miss West. I saw her hurrying down the street with a package under her arm."

"You did?" Dick jumped up. "Aha! She came back after something, saw me hide the box, waited until I had gone to the back yard again, then stole the box and skipped. She thinks she's got a million dollars and it's only—"

"Say!" cried Susan, looking around at her mother as though for protection, "are you and Miss West crazy?"

Suddenly Dick broke off laughing. He grabbed his spade. "Come on!" he cried. "Back to the trenches!" He hastened out to the back yard again and began tearing up the sand on the opposite side of the tree.

He was not long uncovering a box. This one was the size of a full-grown suit case. He carried it into the kitchen, laid it on the table, and broke it open.

Mrs. Ware and Susan were too stunned for speech—almost. The box was packed with bills of large denomination, all tied in neat bundles.

The doorbell jangled sharply. Mrs. Ware answered, and returned with two men, one of whom Dick recognized as Abner Westwick. Old Westwick looked at the box of greenbacks, and nearly fainted. Then he introduced his companion: "Mr. Levers, of the Secret Service."

The officer fixed a suspicious eye on Richard Q. Then he spied Juan Garcia's million.

"Aha!" he cried. "At last I've got it!"

"So you knew about it, too!" exclaimed Dick, stepping between Levers and the old Mexican's million. "Well, you're too late. I was in the garden this morning planting onions and I found it."

"I don't think you want it," grinned Levers. "That's all counterfeit. Wait a minute!" the Secret Service operative went on, raising a hand for silence. "You see, we've been on the trail of this for months. It was made in the East. We got the whole mob except one. He skipped to Mexico with this stuff, and died. A Mex-

ican brought it here, then vanished. When he died night before last, in jail, we located him. At the same time we located the carman who recalled the Mexican with the suit case. A canvas of the beach district indicated that the man probably leased a house from Mr. Westwick. I found Mr. Westwick reading the newspaper account that came out on Garcia's death; but Mr. Westwick couldn't recall the matter until I told him the money was all counterfeit, a trifling detail we had purposely omitted in the news story. Then he suddenly recalled everything. So, we're at the end of the chase. I'll take this 'queer' and—"

"Take it!" laughed Richard Q. "This has been a queer proposition right from the get-away."

VII.

LATER that evening, Susan, sitting on the front porch, gazing pensively at the precise spot where Richard Q. Mandeville, *alias* Georgie Richards, had passed from

view down the street, heard a strange call. It came from somewhere about the fence of dahlias. She stepped quickly to the edge of the porch and looked, and her obstreperous little heart nearly knocked her off the porch.

There, by the fence, was Richard Q. With both hands he had parted the dahlias so he could look between them at Susan. And the dahlias in all their glory were no brighter than Richard Q.'s face. "Look!" Dick pointed to the sign that swung in the breeze: "Select Board and Rooms." "I'm one of the select now, Miss Ware. Say, going to the beach this evening?"

"Well, perhaps." Susan was biting her pretty lips shamefully. "But why are you staying? That treasure—"

"You said it!" Dick broke in. "You see, Miss Westwick got the dead canary, the Secret Service man got that 'queer' million, while I—I'm going to stick around until I get *the treasure*. Know what I mean?"

The Garden of Eden

Part VI

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Trailin'," "The Seventh Man," "Black Jack," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRIUMPH.

DAVID watched them go, and while his back was turned a fierce, soft dialogue passed between Ruth Manning and Ben Connor.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for April 15.



"Are you a man?" she asked him, through her set teeth. "Are you going to let that beautiful little thing die?"

"I'd rather see the cold-hearted fool die in place of Timeh. But what can we do? Nothing. Just smile in his face."

"I hate him!" she exclaimed.

"If you hate him, then use him. Will you?"

"If I can make him follow me, tease him to come, make him think I love him, I'll do it. I'd do anything to torture him."

"I told you he was a savage."

"You were right, Ben. A fiend—not a man! Oh, thank Heavens that I see through him."

Anger gave her color and banished her tears. And when David turned he found what seemed a picture of pleasure. It was infinitely grateful to him. If he had searched and studied for the words he could not have found anything to embitter her more than his first speech.

"And what do you think of the justice of David?" he asked, coming to them.

She could not speak; luckily Connor stepped in and filled the gap of awkward silence.

"A very fine thing to have done, Brother David," he said. "Do you know what I thought of when I heard you talk?"

"Of what?" said David, composing his face to receive the compliment. At that Ruth turned suddenly away, for she dared not trust her eyes, and the hatred which burned in them.

"I thought of the old story of Abraham and Isaac. You were offering up something as dear to you as a child, almost, to the law of the Garden of Eden."

"It is true," said David complacently. "But when the flesh is diseased it must be burned away."

He called to Ruth: "And you, Ruth?"

This childish seeking after compliments made her smile, and naturally he misjudged the smile.

"I think with Benjamin," she said softly.

"Yet my ways in the Garden must seem strange to you," went on David, expanding in the warmth of his own sense of virtue. "But you will grow accustomed to them, I know."

The opening was patent. She was beginning to nod her acquiescence when Connor, in alarm, tapped on the table, once and again in swift telegraphy: "No! No!"

The faint smile went out on her face.

"No," she said to David.

The master of the Garden turned a glance of impatience and suspicion upon the gambler, but Connor carefully made his face a blank. He continued to drum idly on the edge of the table, and the idle drumming was spelling to the girl's quick ear: "Out!"

"You cannot stay?" murmured David.

She drank in his stunned expression. It was like music to her.

"Would you," she said, "be happy away from the Garden, and the horses and your servants? No more am I happy away from my home."

"You are not happy with us?" muttered David. "You are not happy?"

"Could you be away from the Garden?"

"But that is different. The Garden was made by four wise men."

"By five wise men," said the girl. "For you are the fifth."

He was so blind that he did not perceive the irony.

"And therefore," he said, "the Garden is all that the heart should desire. John and Matthew and Luke and Paul made it to fill that purpose."

"But how do you know they succeeded? You have not seen the world beyond the mountains."

"It is full of deceit, hard hearts, cruelty, and cunning."

"It is full of my dear friends, David!"

She thought of the colt and the mare and Elijah; and it became suddenly easy to lure and deceive this implacable judge of others. She touched the arm of the master lightly with her finger tips and smiled.

"Come with me, and see my world!"

"The law which the four made for me—I must not leave!"

"Was it wrong to let me enter?"

"You have made me happy," he argued slowly. "You have made me happier than I was before. And surely I could not have been made happy by that which is wrong. No, it was right to bring you into the valley. The moment I looked at you I knew that it was right."

"Then, will it be wrong to go out with me? You need not stay! But see what lies beyond the mountains before you judge it!"

He shook his head.

"Are you afraid? It will not harm you."

He flushed at that. And then began to walk up and down across the patio. She saw Connor white with anxiety, but about Connor and his affairs she had little concern at this moment. She felt only a cruel pleasure in her control over this man, half savage and half child. Now he stopped abruptly before her.

"If the world, after I see it, still displeases me, when I return, will you come with me, Ruth? Will you come back to the Garden of Eden?"

In the distance Ben Connor was gesturing desperately to make her say yes. But she could not resist a pause—a pause in which torment showed on the face of David. And then, deliberately, she made her eyes soften—made her lips smile.

"Yes, David, I will come back!"

He leaned a little toward her, then straightened with a shudder and crossed the patio to the Room of Silence. Behind that door he disappeared, and left Connor and the girl alone. The gambler threw down his arms as if abandoning a burden.

"Why in the name of God did you let him leave you?" he groaned. "Why? Why? Why?"

"He's going to come," asserted Ruth.

"Never in a thousand years. The fool will talk to his dummy god in yonder and come out with one of his iced looks and talk about 'judgment'! Bah!"

"He'll come."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because—I know."

"You should have waited—to-morrow you could have done it, maybe, but to-day is too soon."

"Listen to me, Ben. I know him. I know his childish, greedy mind. He wants me just as much as he wants his own way. It's partly because I'm new to him, being a woman. It's chiefly because I'm the first thing he's ever met that won't do what he wants. He's going to try to stay with me until he bends me." She flushed with angry excitement.

"It's playing with fire, Ruth. I know you're clever, but—"

"You don't know how clever, but I'm beginning to guess what I can do. I've lost all feeling about that cruel barbarian, Ben. That poor little harmless, pretty colt—oh, I want to make David Eden burn for that! And I can do it. I'm going to wind him around my finger. I've thought of ways while I stood looking at him just now. I know how I can smile at him, and use my eyes, and woo him on, and pretend to be just about to yield and come back with him—then grow cold the next minute and give him his work to do over again. I'm going to make him crawl on his knees in the dust. I'm going to make a fool of him before people. I'm going to make him sign over his horses to us to keep them out of his vicious power. And I can do it—I hate him so that I know I can make him really love me. Oh, I know he doesn't really love me now. I know you're right about him. He simply wants me as he'd want another horse. I'll change him. I'll break him. When he's broken I'm going to laugh in his face—and tell him—to remember Timeh!"

"Ruth!" gasped Connor.

He looked guiltily around, and when he was sure no one was within reach of her voice, he glanced back with admiration.

"By the Lord, Ruth, who'd ever have guessed at all this fire in you? Why, you're a wonder. And I think you can do it. If you can only get him out of the infernal Garden. That's the sticking point! We make or break in the next ten minutes!"

But he had hardly finished speaking before David of Eden came out of the Room of Silence, and with the first glance at his face they knew that the victory was theirs. David of Eden would come with them into the world!

"I have heard the Voice," he said, "and it is just and proper for me to go. In the morning, Ruth, we shall start!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST DAY.

NIGHT came as a blessing to Ruth, for the scenes of the early day had exhausted her. At the very moment when David succumbed to her domination,

her own strength began to fail. As for Connor, it was another story. The great dream which had come to him in far away Lukin, when he watched the little gray gelding win the horse race, was now verging toward a reality. The concrete accomplishment was at hand. Once in the world it was easy to see that David would become clay, molded by the touch of clever Ruth Manning, and then—it would be simply a matter of collecting the millions as they rolled in.

But Ruth was tired. Only one thing sustained her, and that was the burning eagerness to humble this proud and selfish David of Eden. When she thought how many times she had been on the verge of open admiration and sympathy with the man, she trembled and grew cold. But through the fate of poor little Timeh, she thanked Heaven that her eyes had been opened.

She went to her room shortly after dinner, and she slept heavily until the first grayness of the morning. Once awake, in spite of the early hour, she could not sleep again, so she dressed and went into the patio. Connor was already there, pacing restlessly. He had been up all night, he told her, turning over possibilities.

"It seems as though everything has worked out too much according to schedule," he said. "There'll be a break. Something will happen and smash everything!"

"Nothing will happen," she assured him calmly.

He took her hand in his hot fingers.

"Partner"—he began, and then stopped as though he feared to let himself go on.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"On his mountain, waiting for the sun, I guess. He told the black-faces a while ago that he was leaving to-day. Great excitement. They're all chattering about it down in the servants' house."

"Is no one here?"

"Not a soul, I guess."

"Then—we're going into that Room of Silence!"

"Take that chance now? Never in the world! Why, Ruth, if he saw us in there, or guessed we'd been there, he'd probably murder us both. You know how gentle he is when he gets well started?"

"But how will he know? No one is here, and David won't be back from the mountain for a long time if he waits for the sun."

"Just stop thinking about it, Ruth."

"I'll never stop as long as I live, unless I see it. I've dreamed steadily about that room all night."

"Go alone, then, and I'll stay here."

She went resolutely across the patio, and Connor, following with an exclamation, caught her arm roughly at the door.

"You aren't serious?"

"Deadly serious!"

The glitter of her dark eyes convinced him more than words.

"Then we'll go together. But make it short!"

They swept the patio with conscience-stricken glances, and then opened the door. As they did so, the ugly face of Joseph appeared at the entrance to the patio, looked and hastily was withdrawn.

"This is like a woman," muttered Connor, as they closed the door with guilty softness behind them. "Risk her life for a secret that isn't worth a tinker's damn!"

For the room was almost empty, and what was in it was the simplest of the simple. There was a roughly made table in the center. Five chairs stood about it. On the table was a book, and the seven articles made up the entire furnishings. Connor was surprised to see tears in the eyes of Ruth.

"Don't you see?" she murmured in reply to his exclamation. "The four chairs for the four dead men when David sits down in his own place?"

"Well, what of that?"

"What's in the book?"

"Are you going to wait to see that?"

"Open the door a little, Ben, and then we can hear if any one comes near."

He obeyed and came back, grumbling. "We can hear every one except David. That step of his wouldn't break eggs."

He found the girl already poring over the first page of the old book, on which there was writing in a delicate hand.

She read aloud: "The story of the Garden of Eden, who made it and why it was made. Told without error by Matthew."

"Hot stuff!" chuckled Connor. "We got a little time before the sun comes up. But it's getting red in the east. Let's hear some more."

There was nothing imposing about the book. It was a ledger with half-leather binding such as storekeepers use for accounts. Time had yellowed the edges of the paper and the ink was dulled. She read:

"In the beginning there was a man whose name was John."

"Sounds like the start of the Bible," grinned Connor. "Shoot ahead and let's get at the real dope."

"Hush!"

Without raising her eyes, she brushed aside the hand of Connor which had fallen on the side of the ledger. Her own took its place, ready to turn the page.

"In the beginning there was a man whose name was John. The Lord looked upon John and saw his sins. He struck John therefor. First He took two daughters from John, but still the man was blind and did not read the writing of his Maker. And God struck down the eldest son of John, and John sorrowed, but did not understand. Thereat, all in a day, the Lord took from John his wife and his lands and his goods, which were many and rich.

"Then John looked about him, and lo! he was alone.

"In the streets his friends forgot him and saw not his passing. The sound of his own footfall was lonely in his house, and he was left alone with his sins.

"So he knew that it was the hand of God which struck him, and he heard a voice which said in the night to him: 'O John, ye who have been too much with the world must leave it and go into the wilderness.'

"Then the heart of John smote him and he prayed God to send him not out alone, and God relented and told him to go forth and take with him three simple men.

"So John on the next morning called to his negro, a slave who was all that remained in his hands.

"'Abraham,' he said, 'you who were a slave are free.'

"Then he went into the road and walked all the day until his feet bled. He rested

by the side of the road and one came who kneeled before him and washed his feet, and John saw that it was Abraham. And Abraham said: 'I was born into your service and I can only die out of it.'

"They went on together until they came to three robbers fighting with one strong man, and John helped this man and drove away the robbers.

"Then the tall man began to laugh. 'They would have robbed me because I was once rich,' he said, 'but another thief had already plundered me, and they have gotten only broken heads for their industry.' Then John was sorry for the fortune that was stolen.

"'Not I,' said the tall man, 'but I am sorry for the brother I lost with the money.' Then he told them how his own brother had cheated him. 'But,' he said, 'there is only one way to beat the devil, and that is to laugh at him.'

"Now John saw this was a good man, so he opened his heart to Luke, which was the name of him who had been robbed. Then Luke fell in with the two and went on with them.

"They came to a city filled with plague so that the dead were buried by the dying and the dog howled over his master in the street; the son fled from the father and the mother left her child. They found one man who tended the sick out of charity and the labor was too great for even his broad shoulders. He had a broad, ugly face, but in his eye was a clear fire.

"'Brother, what is your name?' said John, and the man answered that he was called Paul, and begged them for the sweet mercy of Christ to aid him in his labors.

"But John said: 'Rise, Paul, and follow me.'

"And Paul said: 'How can I follow the living when the dying call to me?'

"But John said: 'Nevertheless, leave them, for these are carrion, but your soul in which is life eternal is worth all these and far more.'

"Then Paul felt the power of John and followed him and took, also, his gray horses which were unlike others, and of his servants those who would follow him for love, and in wagons he put much wealth.

"So they all rode on as a mighty caravan until they came, at the side of the road, to a youth lying in the meadow with his hands behind his head whistling, and a bird hovering above him repeated the same note. They spoke to him and he told them that he was an outcast because he would not labor.

" 'The world is too pleasant to work in,' he said, and whistled again, and the bird above him made answer.

"Then John said: 'Here is a soul worth all of ours. Rise, brother, and come with us.'

"So Matthew rose and followed him, and he was the third and last man to join John, who was the beginning.

"Then they came to a valley set about with walls and with a pleasant river running through it, and here they entered and called it the Garden of Eden because in it men should be pure of heart once more. And they built their houses with labor and lived in quiet and the horses multiplied and the Garden blossomed under their hands."

Here Ruth marked her place with her finger while she wiped her eyes.

"Do you mean to say this babble is getting you?" growled Ben Connor.

"Please!" she whispered. "Don't you see that it's beautiful?"

And she returned to the book.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ROOM OF SILENCE.

THEN John sickened and said: 'Bring me into the room of silence.' So they brought him to the place where they sat each day to converse with God in the holy stillness and hear His voice.

"Then John said: 'I am about to depart from among you, and before my going I put this command on you that you find in the world a male infant too young to know its father or mother, or without father and mother living. Rear that child to manhood in the valley, for even as I depart so will you all do, and the Garden of Eden will be left tenantless.'

"So when John was dead Matthew went

forth and found a male child and brought him to the valley and the two said: 'Where was the child found and what is its name?' And Matthew said: 'It was found in the place to which God led me and its name hereafter shall be David.'

"So peace was on the valley, and David grew tall and strong. Then Luke died, and Paul died in a drift of snow and Matthew grew very old and wrote these words for the eye of David."

The smooth running, finely made letters come to an end, the narrative was taken up in fresher ink and in a bold, heavy hand of large characters.

"One day Matthew called for David and said: 'My hands are cold, whereby I know I am about to die. As I lay last night with death for a bedfellow thoughts came to me, which are these: We have been brother and father and son to one another. But do not grieve that I am gone. I inherit a place of peace, but you shall come to torment unless you find a woman in the world and bring her here to bear children to you and be your wife.'

"Then David groaned in his heart and he said: 'How shall I know her when I find her?'

"And Matthew said: 'By her simplicity.'

"And David said: 'There may be many who are simple.'

"And Matthew said: 'I have never known such a woman. But when you see her your heart will rise up and claim her. Therefore, within five years, before you are grown too old, go out and find this woman and wed her.'

"And on that day Matthew died, and a great anguish came to David. The days passed heavily. And for five years he has waited."

There was another interval of blank paper, and then the pen had been taken up anew, hurriedly, and driven with such force and haste that it tore the paper-surface.

"The woman is here!"

Her fingers stiffened about the edges of the book. Raising her head, she looked out through the little window and saw the tree tops down the hillside brightening against the red of the dawn. But Connor could not see her face. He only noted the place

at which she had stopped, and now he began to laugh.

"Can you beat that? That poor dub!"

She turned to him, slowly, a face so full of mute anguish that the gambler stopped his laughter to gape at her. Was she taking this seriously? Was this the Bluebeard's chamber which was to ruin all his work?

Not that he perceived what was going on in her mind, but her expression made him aware, all at once, of the morning-quiet. Far down the valley a horse neighed and a bird swooping past the window cast in on them one thrilling phrase of music. And Connor saw the girl change under his very eye. She was looking straight at him without seeing his face and into whatever distance her glance went he felt that he could not follow her. Here at the very threshold of success the old ledger was proving a more dangerous enemy than David himself. Connor fumbled for words, the Open Sesame which would let in the common sense of the everyday world upon the girl. But the very fear of that crisis kept him dumb. He glanced from the pale hand on the ledger to her face, and it seemed to him that beauty had fallen upon her out of the book.

"The woman is here! God has sent her!"

At that she cried out faintly, her voice trembling with self-scorn: "God has sent me—me!"

"The heart of David stood up and beat in his throat when he saw her," went on the rough, strong writing. "She passed the gate. Every step she took was into the soul of David. As I went beside her the trees grew taller and the sky was more blue.

"She has passed the gate. She is here. She is mine!"

"What am I that she should be mine? God has sent her to show me that my strength is clumsy. I have no words to fit her. When I look into her eyes I see her soul; my vision leaps from star to star, a great distance, and I am filled with humility. O Father in Heaven, having led her to my hand, teach me to give her happiness, to pour her spirit full of content."

She closed the book reverently and

pressed her hands against her face. He heard her murmuring: "What have I done? God forgive me!"

Connor grew angry. It was no time for trifling.

He touched her arm: "Come on out of this, Ruth. If you're going to get religion, try it later."

At that she flung away and faced him, and what he saw was a revelation of angry scorn.

"Don't touch me," she stammered at him. "You cheat! Is that the barbarian you were telling me about? Is that the cruel, selfish fool you tried to make me think was David of Eden?"

His own weapons were turning against him, but he retained his self-control.

"I won't listen to you, Ruth. It's this hush-stuff that's got you. It's this infernal room. It makes you feel that the fathead has actually got the dope from God."

"How do you know that God hasn't come to him here? At least, he's had the courage and the faith to believe it. What faith have we? I know your heaven, Ben Connor. It's paved with dollar bills. And mine, too. We've come sneaking in here like cowardly thieves. Oh, I hate myself, I loathe myself. I've stolen his heart, and what have I to give him in exchange? I'm not even worthy to love him! Barbarian? He's so far greater and finer than we are that we aren't worthy to look in his face!"

"By the Lord!" groaned Connor. "Are you double-crossing me?"

"Could I do anything better? Who tempted me like a devil and brought me here? Who taught me to play the miserable game with David? You, you, you!"

Perspiration was streaming down the white face of Connor.

"Try to give me a chance and listen one minute, Ruth. But for God's sake don't fly off the handle and smash everything when we're next door to winning. Maybe I've done wrong. I don't see how. I've tried to give this David a chance to be happy the way any other man would want to be happy. Now you turn on me because he's written some high-flying chatter in a book!"

"Because I thought he was a selfish

sham, and now I see that he's real. He's humbled himself to me—to me! I'm not worthy to touch his feet! And you—"

"Maybe I'm rotten. I don't say I'm all I should be, but half of what I've done has been for you. The minute I saw you at that key in Lukin I knew I wanted you. I've gone on wanting you ever since. It's the first time in my life—but I love you, Ruth. Give me one more chance. Put this thing through and I'll turn over the rest of my life to fixing you up so's you'll be happy."

She watched him for a moment incredulously; then she broke into hysterical laughter.

"If you loved me could you have made me do what I've done? Love? You? But I know what real love is. It's written into that book. I've heard him talk. I'm full of his voice, of his face.

"It's the only fine thing about me. For the rest, we're shams, both of us—cheats—crooked—small, sneaking cheats!"

She stopped with a cry of alarm; the door behind her stood open and in the entrance was David of Eden. In the background was the ugly, grinning face of Joseph. This was his revenge.

Connor made one desperate effort to smile, but the effort failed wretchedly. Neither of them could look at David; they could only steal glances at one another and see their guilt.

"David, my brother—" began the gambler heavily.

But the voice of the master broke in: "Oh Abraham, Abraham, would to God that I had listened!"

He stood to one side, and made a sweeping gesture.

"Come out, and bring the woman."

They shrank past him and stood blinking in the light of the newly risen sun. Joseph was hugging himself with the cold and his mute delight. The master closed the door and faced them again.

"Even in the Room of Silence!" he said slowly. "Was it not enough to bring sin into the Garden? But you have carried it even into the holy place!"

Connor found his tongue. The fallen head of Ruth told him that there was no

help to be looked for from her, and the crisis forced him into a certain boisterous glibness of speech.

"Sin, Brother David? What sin? To be sure, Ruth was too curious. She went into the Room of Silence, but as soon as I knew she was there I went to fetch her, when—"

He had even cast out one arm in a gesture of easy persuasion, and now it was caught at the wrist in a grip that burned through the flesh to the bones. Another hand clutched his coat at the throat. He was lifted and flung back against the wall by a strength like that of a madman, or a wild animal. One convulsive effort showed him his helplessness, and he cried out more in horror than fear. Another cry answered him, and Ruth strove to press in between, tearing futilely at the arms of David.

A moment later Connor was miraculously freed. He found David a long pace away and Ruth before him, her arms flung out to give him shelter while she faced the master of the garden.

"He is saved," said David, "and you are free. Your love has ransomed him. What price has he paid to win you so that you will even risk death for him?"

"Oh, David," sobbed the girl, "don't you see I only came between you to keep you from murder? Because he isn't worth it!"

But the master of the Garden was laughing in a way that made Connor look about for a weapon and shrink because he found none; only the greedy eyes of Joseph, close by. David had come again close to the girl; he even took both her hands in one of his and slipped his arm about her. To Connor his self-control now seemed more terrible than that one outbreak of murdering passion.

"Still lies?" said David. "Still lies to me? Beautiful Ruth—never more beautiful than now, even when you lied to me with your eyes and your smiles and your promises! The man is nothing. He came like a snake to me, and his life is no more worth than the life of a snake. Let him live, let him die; it is no matter. But you, Ruth! I am not even angered. I see you already from a great distance, a beautiful, evil thing that has been so close to me,

For you have been closer to me than you are now that my arm is around you, touching you for the last time, holding your warmth and your tender body, keeping both your hands, which are smaller and softer than the hands of a child. But mighty hands, nevertheless.

"They have held the heart of David, and they have almost thrown his soul into eternal hellfire. Yet you have been closer to me than you are now. You have been in my heart of hearts. And I take you from it sadly—with regret, for the sin of loving you has been sweet."

She had been sobbing softly all this time, but now she mastered herself long enough to draw back a little, taking his hands with a desperate eagerness, as though they gave her a hold upon his mind.

"Give me one minute to speak out what I have to say. Will you give me one half minute, David?"

His glance rose past her, higher, until it was fixed on the east, and as he stood there with his head far back Connor guessed for the first time at the struggle which was going on within him. The girl pressed closer to him, drawing his hands down as though she would make him stoop to her.

"Look at me, David!"

"I see your face clearly."

"Still, look at me for the one last time."

"I dare not, Ruth!"

"But will you believe me?"

"I shall try. But I am glad to hear your voice, for the last time."

"I've come to you like a cheat, David, and I've tried to win you in order to steal the horses away, but I've stayed long enough to see the truth.

"If everything in the valley were offered me—the horses and the men—and everything outside of the valley, without you, I'd throw them away. I don't want them. Oh, if prayers could make you believe, you'd believe me now; because I'm praying to you, David.

"You love me, David. I can feel you trembling, and I love you more than I ever dreamed it was possible to love. Let me come back to you. I don't want the world or anything that's in it. I only want you,

David—I only want you! Will you believe me?"

And Connor saw David of Eden sway with the violence of his struggle.

But he murmured at length, as one in wonder:

"How you are rooted in me, Ruth! How you are wound into my life, so that it is like tearing out my heart to part from you. But the God of the Garden and John and Matthew has given me strength." He stepped back from her.

"You are free to go, but if you return the doom against you is death like that of any wild beast that steals down the cliffs to kill in my fields. Begone, and let me see your face no more. Joseph, take them to the gate."

And he turned his back with a slowness which made his resolution the more unmistakable.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONNOR MAKES A LAST STAND.

IT was, unquestionably, a tempting of Providence, but Connor was almost past caring. Far off he heard the neighing of an Eden Gray; Ruth, with her bowed head and face covered in her hands, was before him, sobbing; and all that he had come so near to winning and yet had lost rushed upon the mind of the gambler. He hardly cared now whether he lived or died. He called to the master of the Garden, and David whirled on him with a livid face. Connor walked into the reach of the lion.

"I've made my play," he said through his teeth, "and I don't holler because I've lost the big stakes. Now I'm going to give you something to show that I'm not a piker—some free advice, Dave!"

"O man of many lies," said David. "Peace! For when I hear you there is a great will come on me to take you by the throat and hear your life go out with a rattle."

"A minute ago," said Connor coolly enough, "I was scared, and I admit it, but I'm past that stage. I've lost too much to care, and now you're going to hear me out to the last damned word!"

"God of Paul and Matthew," said David, his voice broken with rage, "let temptation be far from me!"

"You can take it standing or sitting," said Connor, "and be damned to you!"

The blind fury sent David a long step nearer, but he checked himself even as one hand rose toward Connor.

"It is the will of God that you live to be punished hereafter."

"No matter about the future. I'm chattering in the present. I'm going to come clean, not because I'm afraid of you, but because I'm going to clear up the girl. The old black-face, Abe, had the cold dope, well enough. I came to crook you out of a horse, Dave, my boy, and I did it. But after I'd got away with the goods I tried to play hog, and I came back for the rest of the horses."

He paused; but David showed no emotion.

"You take the punishment very well," admitted Connor. "There's a touch of sporting blood in you, but the trouble is that the good in you has never had a fair chance to come to the top. I came back, and I brought Ruth with me."

"I'll tell you about her. She's meant to be an honest-to-God woman—the kind that keeps men clean—she's meant for the big-time stuff. And where did I find her? In a jay town punching a telegraph key. It was all wrong."

"She was made to spend a hundred thousand a year. Everything that money buys means a lot to her. I saw that right away. I liked her. I did more than like her; I loved her. That makes you flinch under the whip, does it? I don't say I'm worthy of her, but I'm as near to her as you are."

"I admit I played a rotten part. I went to this girl, all starved the way she was for the velvet touch. I laid my proposition before her. She was to come up here and bamboozle you. She was to knock your eye out and get you clear of the valley with the horses. Then I was going to run those horses on the tracks and make a barrel of coin for all of us."

"You'd think she'd take on a scheme like that right away; but she didn't. She

fought to keep from going crooked until I showed her it was as much to your advantage as it was to ours. Then she decided to come, and she came. I worked my stall and she worked hers, and she got into the valley."

"But this voice of yours in the Room of Silence—why didn't it put you wise to my game? Well, David, I'll tell you why. The voice is the bunk. It's your own thoughts. It's your own hunches. The god you've been worshiping up here is yourself, and in the end you're going to pay hell for doing it."

"Well, here's the girl in the Garden, and everything going smooth. We have you, and she's about to take you out and show you how to be happy in the world. But then she has to go into your secret room. That's the woman of it. You blame her? Why, you infernal blockhead, you've been making love to her like God Almighty speaking out of a cloud of fire! How could she hear your line of chatter without wanting to find out the secrets that made you the nut you are?"

"Well, we went in, and we found out. We found out what? Enough to make the girl see that you're 'noble,' as she calls it. Enough to make me see that you're a simp. You've been chasing bubbles all your life. You're all wrong from the first."

"Those first four birds who started the Garden, who were they? There was John, a rich fellow who'd hit the high spots, had his life messed up, and was ready to quit. He'd lived enough. Then there was Luke, a gent who'd been double-crossed and was sore at the world on general principles."

"Paul would have been a full-sized saint in the old days. He was never meant to live the way other men have to live. And finally there's a guy who lies in the grass and whistles to a bird—Matthew. A poet—and all poets are nuts."

"Well, all those fellows were tired of the world—fed up with it. Boil them down, and they come to this: they thought more about the welfare of their souls than they did about the world. Was that square? It wasn't! They left the mothers and fathers, the brothers and sisters, the friends, everything that had brought them into the

world and raised 'em. They go off to take care of themselves.

"That wasn't bad enough for 'em—they had to go out and pluck you and bring you up with the same rotten hunches. Davie, my boy, d'you think a man is made to live by himself?"

"You haven't got fed up with the world; you're no retired high liver; you haven't had a chance to get double-crossed more than once; you're not a crazy poet; and you're a hell of a long ways from being a martyr.

"I'll tell you what you are. You're a certain number of pounds of husky muscle and bone going to waste up here in the mountains. You've been alone so much that you've got to thinking that your own hunches come from God, and that 'd spoil any man.

"Live alone? Bah! You've had more concentrated since Ruth came into this valley than you've ever had before or you'll ever have again.

"Right now you're breaking your heart to take her in your arms and tell her to stop crying, but your pride won't let you.

"You tried to make yourself a mystery with your room of silence and all that bunk. But no woman can stand a mystery. They all got to read their husband's letters. You try to bluff her with a lot of fancy words and partly scare her. It's fear that sent the four men up here in the first place—fear of the world.

"And they've lived by fear. They scared a lot of poor black-faces into coming with them for the sake of their souls, they said. And they kept them here the same way. And they've kept you here by telling you that you'd be damned if you went over the mountains.

"And you still keep the negroes here the same way. Do you think they stay because they love you? Give them a chance and see if they won't pack up and beat it for their old homes.

"Now, show me that you're a man and not a fatheaded bluff. Be a man and admit that what you call the Voice is just your pride. Be a man and take that girl in your arms and tell her you love her. I've made a mess of things; I've ruined her

life, and I want to see you give her a chance to be happy.

"Because she's not the kind to love more than one man if she lives to be a thousand. Now, David Eden, step out and give yourself a chance!"

It had been a gallant last stand on the part of Connor. But he was beaten before he finished, and he knew it.

"Are you done?" said David.

"I'm through, fast enough. It's up to you!"

"Joseph, take the man and his woman out of the Garden of Eden."

The last thing that Connor ever saw of David Eden was his back as he closed the door of the Room of Silence upon himself. The gambler went to Ruth. She was dry-eyed by this time, and there was a peculiar blankness in her expression that went to his heart.

Secretly he had hoped that his harangue to David would also be a harangue to the girl and make her see through the master of the Garden; but that hope disappeared at once.

He stayed a little behind her when they were conducted out of the patio by the grinning Joseph. He helped her gently to her horse, the old gray gelding, and when he was in place on his own horse, with the mule pack behind him, they started for the gate.

She had not spoken since they started. At the gate she moved as if to turn and look back, but controlled the impulse and bowed her head once more. Joseph came beside the gambler and stretched out his great palm. In the center of it was the little ivory ape's head which had bought Connor his entrance into the valley and had won the hatred of the big negro, and had, eventually, ruined all his plans.

"It was given freely," grinned Joseph, "and it is freely returned."

"Very well."

Connor took it and hurled it out of sight along the bowlders beyond the gate. The last thing that he saw of the Garden of Eden and its men was that broad, apelike grin of Joseph, and then he hurried his horse to overtake Ruth, whose gelding had been plodding steadily along the ravine.

He attempted for the first time to speak to her.

"Only a quitter tries to make up for the harm he's done by apologizing. But I've got to tell you the one thing in my life I most regret. It isn't tricking David of Eden, but it's doing what I've done to you. Will you believe me when I say that I'd give a lot to undo what I've done?"

She only raised her hand to check him and ventured a faint smile of reassurance. It was the smile that hurt Connor to the quick.

They left the ravine. They toiled slowly up the difficult trail, and even when they had reached such an altitude that the floor of the valley of the Garden was unrolling behind them the girl never once moved to look back.

"So," thought Connor, "she'll go through the rest of her life with her head down, watching the ground in front of her. And this is my work."

He was not a sentimentalist, but a lump was forming in his throat when, at the very crest of the mountain, the girl turned suddenly in her saddle and stopped the gray.

"Only makes it worse to stay here," muttered Connor. "Come on, Ruth."

But she seemed not to hear him, and there was something in her smile that kept him from speaking again.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE NEGROES SING.

THE Room of Silence had become to David Eden a chamber of horror.

The four chairs around him, which had hitherto seemed filled with the ghosts of the four first masters of the Garden, were now empty to his imagination. In this place where he had so often found unflinching consolation, unflinching counsel, he was now burdened by the squat, heavy walls, and the low ceiling. It was like a prison to him.

For all his certainty was gone. "You've made yourself your God," the gambler had said. "Fear made the Garden of Eden, fear keeps the men in it. Do you think the negroes stay for love of you?"

Benjamin had proved a sinner, no doubt,

but there had been a ring of conviction in his words that remained in the mind of David. How could he tell that the man was not right? Certainly, now that he had once doubted the wisdom of that silent Voice, the mystery was gone. The room was empty; the holiness had departed from the Garden of Eden with the departing of Ruth.

He found himself avoiding the thought of her, for whenever her image rose before him it was torture.

He dared not even inquire into the depression which weighed down his spirits, for he knew that the loss of the girl was the secret of it all.

One thing at least was certain: the strong, calming voice which he had so often heard in the Room of Silence, no longer dwelt there, and with that in mind he rose and went into the patio.

In a corner, screened by a climbing vine, hung a large bell which had only been rung four times in the history of the Garden of Eden, and each time it was for the death of the master. David tore the green away and struck the bell. The brazen voice crowded the patio and pealed far away, and presently the negroes came. They came in wild-eyed haste, and when they saw David alive before them they stared at him as if at a ghost.

"As it was in the beginning," said David when the circle had been formed and hushed, "death follows sin. Sin has come into the Garden of Eden and the voice of God has died out of it. Therefore the thing for which you have lived here so long is gone. If for love of David, you wish to stay, remain; but if your hearts go back to your old homes, return to them. The wagons and the oxen are yours. All the furnishing of the houses are yours. There is also a large store of money in my chest which Elijah shall divide justly among you. And on your journey Elijah shall lead you, if you go forth, for he is a just man and fit to lead others. Do not answer now, but return to your house and speak to one another. Afterward, send one man. If you stay in the Garden he shall tell me. If you depart I shall bid you farewell through him. Begone!"

They went out soft-footed, as though the master of the Garden had turned into an animal liable to spring on them from behind. He smiled as he watched them. What children they were, in spite of their age? Without his orders, how could they be directed?

He began to pace up and down the patio, after a time, rather impatiently. No doubt the foolish old men were holding forth at great length. They were appointing the spokesman, and they were framing the speech which he would make to David telling of their devotion to him, whether the spirit was gone or remained. They would remain; and Benjamin's prophecy had been that of a spiteful fool. Yet even if they stayed, how empty the valley would be—how hollow of all pleasure!

It was at this point in his thoughts that he heard a sound of singing down the hillside from the house of the servants—first a single, thin, trembling voice to which others were added until the song was heartened and grew full and strong. It was a song which David had never heard before. It rang and swung with a peculiarly happy rhythm, growing shriller as the old men seemed to gather their enthusiasm. The words, sung in a thick dialect, were stranger to David than the tune, but as nearly as he could make out the song ran as follows:

"Oh, Jo, come back from the cold and the stars

For the cows they has come to the pasture bars,

And the little game chicken's beginning to crow:

Come back to us, Jo; come back to us, Jo!

"He was walkin' in the gyarden in the cool o' the day

When He seen my pickaninny in the clover blossoms play.

"He was walkin' in the gyarden an' the dew was on His feet

When He seen my pickaninny so little an' sweet.

"They was flowers in the gyarden, roses, an' such,

But the roses an' the pansies, they didn't count for much.

"An' He left the clover blossoms fo' the bees the next day

An' the roses an' the pansies, but He took Jo away.

"Oh, darkies rock yo' cradles, an' darkies sing yo' song,

For He walked in the gyarden an' He took Jo along.

"Oh, Jo, come back from the cold and the stars

For the cows they has come to the pasture bars,

And the little game chicken has started to crow:

Come back to us, Jo; come back to us, Jo!"

He knew their voices and he knew their songs, but never had David heard his servants sing as they sang this song. Their hymns were strong and pleasant to the ear, but in this old tune there was a melody and a lilt that brought a lump in his throat. And there was a heart to their singing, so that he almost saw them swaying their shoulders to the melody.

It was the writing on the wall for David.

Out of that song he built a picture of their old lives, the hot sunshine, the dust, and all the things which Matthew had told him of the slaves and their ways before the time of the making of the Garden.

He waited, then, either for their messenger or for another song; but he neither saw the one nor heard the other for a considerable time. An angry pride sustained him in the meantime, in the face of a life alone in the Garden. Far off, he heard the neigh of the grays in the meadow near the gate, and then the clarion clear answer of Giani near the house. He was grateful for that sound. All men, it seemed, were traitors to him. Let them go. He would remain contented with the Eden grays. They would come and go with him like human companions. Better the noble head of Giani near him than the treacherous cunning of Benjamin! He accepted his fate, then, not with calm resignation, but with fierce anger against Connor, who had brought this ruin on him, and against the negroes who were preparing to desert him.

He could hear plainly the creaking of the great wains as the oxen were yoked to them and they were dragged into position to receive the burdens of the property they were to take with them into the outer world. And, in the meantime, he paced through the patio in one of those silent passions which eat at the heart of a man.

He was not aware of the entrance of Elijah. When he saw the old negro, Elijah had fallen on his knees near the entrance to the patio, and every line of his time-dried body expressed the terror of the bearer of bad tidings. David looked at him for a moment in silent rage.

"Do you think, Elijah," he said at last, "that I shall be so grieved to know that you and the others will leave me and the Garden of Eden? No, no! For I shall be happier alone. Therefore, speak and be done!"

"Timeh—" began the old man faintly.

"You have done that last duty, then, Elijah? Timeh is no longer alive?"

"The day is still new, David. Twice I went to Timeh, but each time when I was about to lead her away, the neighing of Juri troubled me and my heart failed."

"But the third time you remembered my order?"

"But the third time—there was no third time. When the bell sounded we gathered. Even the watchers by the gates—Jacob and Isaac—came and the gate was left unguarded—Timeh was in the pasture near the gate with Juri—and—"

"They are gone! They have passed through the gate! Call Zacharias and Joseph. Let them mount and follow and bring Juri back with the foal!"

"Oh, David, my master—"

"What is it now, Elijah, old stammerer? Of all my servants none has cost me so much pain; to none shall I say farewell with so little regret. What is it now? Why do you not rise and call them as I bid you? Do you think you are free before you pass the gates?"

"David, there are no horses to follow Juri!"

"What!"

"The God of John and Paul give me strength to tell and give you strength to hear me in patience! When you had spoken, and the servants went back to speak of the strange things you had said, some of them spoke of the old days before they heard the call and followed to the Garden, and then a song was raised beginning with Zacharias—"

"Zacharias!" echoed David, softly and

fiercely. "Him whom I have favored above the others!"

"But while the others sang, I heard a neighing near the gate and I remembered your order and your judgment of Timeh, and I went sorrowfully to fulfill your will. But near the gate I saw the meadow empty of the horses, and while I stood wondering, I heard a chorus of neighing beyond the gate. There was a great answer just behind me, and I turned and saw Glani racing at full speed. I called to him, but he did not hear and went on, straight through the pillars of the gate, and disappeared in the ravine beyond. Then I ran to the gate and looked out, but the horses were gone from sight—they have left the Garden—they are free—"

"And happy!" said David in a terrible voice. "They, too, have only been held by fear and never by love. Let them go. Let all go which is kept here by fear. Why should I care? I am enough by myself. When all is gone and I am alone the Voice shall return and be my companion. It is well. Let every living thing depart. David is enough unto himself. Go, Elijah! And yet pause before you go!"

He went into his room and came out bearing the heavy chest of money, which he carried to the gate.

"Go to your brothers and bid them come for the money. It will make them rich enough in the world beyond the mountains, but to me there is need of no money. Silence and peace is my wish. Go, and let me hear their voices no more, let me not see one face. Ingrates, fools, and traitors! Let them find their old places; I have no regret. Begone!"

And Elijah, as one under the shadow of a raised whip, skulked from the patio and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HUMILITY.

THE last quiet began for David. He had heard the sounds of departure.

He had heard the rumble of the ox-wains begin and go slowly toward the gate with never the sound of a human voice,

and he pictured, with a grim satisfaction, the downcast faces and the frightened, guilty glances, as his servants fled, conscious that they were betraying their master. It filled him with a sort of sulky content which was more painful than sorrow. But before the sound of the wagons died out the wind blew back from the gate of the Garden a thin, joyous chorus of singing voices. They were leaving him with songs!

He was incredulous for a time. He felt, first, a great regret that he had let them go. Then, in an overwhelming wave of righteousness, he determined to dismiss them from his mind. They were gone; but worse still, the horses were gone, and the valley around him was empty! He remembered the dying prophecy of Abraham, now, as the stern Elijah had repeated it. He had let the world into the Garden, and the tide of the world's life, receding, would take all the life of the Garden away beyond the mountains among other men.

The feeling that Connor had been right beset him: that the four first masters had been wrong, and that they had raised David in error. Yet his pride still upheld him.

That day he went resolutely about the routine. He was not hungry, but when the time came he went into the big kitchen and prepared food. It was a place of much noise. The great copper kettles chimed and murmured whenever he touched them, and they spoke to him of the servants who were gone. Half of his bitterness had already left him and he could remember those days in his childhood when Abraham had told him tales, and Zacharias had taught him how to ride at the price of many a tumble from the lofty back of the gentle old mare. Yet he set the food on the table in the patio and ate it with steady resolution. Then he returned to the big kitchen and cleansed the dishes.

It was the late afternoon, now, the time when the sunlight becomes yellow and loses its heat, and the heavy blue shadow sloped across the patio. A quiet time. Now and again he found that he was tense with waiting for sounds in the wind of the servants returning for the night from the fields, and the shrill whinny of the colts coming back from the pastures to the paddocks. But he

remembered what had happened and made himself relax.

There was a great dread before him. Finally he realized that it was the coming of the night, and he went into the Room of Silence for the last time to find consolation. The book of Matthew had always been a means of bringing the consolation and counsel of the Voice, but when he opened the book he could only think of the girl, as she must have leaned above it. How had she read? With a smile of mockery or with tears? He closed the book; but still she was with him. It seemed that when he turned in the chair he must find her waiting behind him and he found himself growing tense with expectation, his heart beating rapidly.

Out of the Room of Silence he fled as if a curse lived in it, and without following any conscious direction, he went to the room of Ruth.

The fragrance had left the wild flowers, and the great golden blossoms at the window hung thin and limp, the bell lips hanging close together, the color faded to a dim yellow. The green things must be taken away before they molded. He raised his hand to tear down the transplanted vine, but his fingers fell away from it. To remove it was to destroy the last trace of her. She had seen these flowers; on account of them she had smiled at him with tears of happiness in her eyes. The skin of the mountain lion on the floor was still rumpled where her foot had fallen, and he could see the indistinct outline where the heel of her shoe had pressed.

He avoided that place when he stepped back, and turning, he saw her bed. The dappled deerskin lay crumpled back where her hand had tossed it as she rose that morning, and in the blankets was the distinct outline of her body. He knew where her body had pressed, and there was the hollow made by her head in the pillow.

Something snapped in the heart of David. The sustaining pride which had kept his head high all day slipped from him like the strength of the runner when he crosses the mark. David fell upon his knees and buried his face where her head had lain, and his arms curved as though around her

body. Connor had been right. He had made himself his god, and this was the punishment. The mildness of a new humility came to him in the agony of his grief. He found that he could pray, not the proud prayers of the old days when David talked as an equal to the voice, but that most ancient prayer of sinners:

"O Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief!"

And the moment the whisper had passed his lips there was a blessed relief from pain. There was a sound at the window, and turning to it, he saw the head and the arched neck of Glani against the red of the sunset—Glani looking at him with pricked ears. He went to the stallion, incredulous, with steps as short as a child which is afraid, and at his coming Glani whinnied softly. At that the last of David's pride fell from him. He cast his arms around the neck of the stallion and wept with deep sobs that tore his throat, and under the grip of his arms he felt the stallion trembling. He was calmer, at length, and he climbed through the window and stood beside Glani under the brilliant sunset sky.

"And the others, O Glani," he said. "Have they returned likewise? Timeh shall live. I, who have judged others so often, have been myself judged and found wanting. Timeh shall live. What am I that I should speak of the life or the death of so much as the last bird in the trees? But have they all returned, all my horses?"

He whistled that call which every gray knew as a rallying sound, a call that would bring them at a dead gallop with answering neighs. But when the thin sound of the whistle died out there was no reply. Only Glani had moved away and was looking back to David as if he bid the master follow.

"Is it so, Glani?" said the master. "They have not come back, but you have returned to lead me to them? The woman, the man, the servants, and the horses. But we shall leave the valley, walking together. Let the horses go, and the man and the woman and the servants; but we shall go forth together and find the world beyond the mountains."

And with his hand tangled in the mane of the stallion, he walked down the road, away from the hill, the house, the lake. He would not look back, for the house on the hill seemed to him a tomb, the monument of the four dead men who had made this little kingdom.

By the time he reached the gate the Garden of Eden was awash with the shadows of the evening, but the higher mountaintops before him were still rosy with the sunset. He paused at the gate and looked out on them, and when he turned to Glani again, he saw a figure crouched against the base of the rock wall. It was Ruth, weeping, her head fallen into her hands with weariness. Above her stood Glani, his head turned to the master in almost human inquiry. The deep cry of David wakened her. The gentle hands of David raised her to her feet.

"You have not come to drive me away again?"

"To drive you from the Garden? Look back. It is black. It is full of death, and the world and our life is before us. I have been a king in the Garden. It is better to be a man among men. All the Garden was mine. Now my hands are empty. I bring you nothing, Ruth. Is it enough? Ah, my dear, you are weeping!"


"With happiness. My heart is breaking with happiness, David."

He tipped up her face and held it between his hands. Whatever he saw in the darkness that was gathering it was enough to make him sigh. Then he raised her to the back of Glani, and the stallion, which had never borne a weight except that of David, stood like a stone. So David went up the valley holding the hand of Ruth and looking up to her with laughter in his eyes, and she, with one hand pressed against her breast, laughed back to him, and the great stallion went with his head turned to watch them.

"How wonderful are the ways of God!" said David. "Through a thief he has taught me wisdom; through a horse he has taught me faith; and you, oh, my love, are the key with which he has unlocked my heart!"

And they began to climb the mountain.

(The end.)



The Last to Leave the Ship

by George M. A. Cain

CAPTAIN WAIN'S bloodshot eyes gave one glance at the thick haze to eastward and another at the dimly seen palm tops of Wa'yau Island. He turned then on Mr. Crowther, the mate, with a bombardment of seamanlike profanity that blasted like a typhoon.

And Mr. Crowther took it straight, rising in its tone and its fierceness, like the wind that told them both of the ship's doom. It behooved him to take it. In his heart of hearts he did not question the skipper's perfect right to call him all the names that did not belong to him. In fact, he was inwardly glad to have the "old man" take it out in swearing. Captain Wain's justice was so tempered with mercy that, if he so far forgot himself as to curse a subordinate, he repented eventually and refrained from inflicting other penalties. And Crowther knew he deserved other penalties.

In his own way Captain Wain was already figuring the matter out as Crowther did. The windward coast of Wa'yau Island is as mean a spot in a blow as the Pacific Ocean owns. They were facing death. It was no time for swearing.

Morally, Captain Wain would have felt more justified in shooting Crowther. But the law would not let him do that; and something else was hindering him from doing the things the law would allow. He

did not mean to punish the mate. He had to do something. So he swore.

And he inwardly approved of the way Crowther took it, with eyes not faltering, yet not defiant, with an occasional nod that somehow accepted punishment and awaited more as voluntary penance for acknowledged guilt.

Then Crowther's eye wavered an instant to the right, toward the head of the stairway from the deck, behind the skipper's shoulder. And—

"They were your orders, sir—sou'west by south till you came up. I had 'em from you myself. I gave 'em to Mr. Hupper, as you said."

The flimsiness of the excuse rightly raised Captain Wain's fury. He had said he would be back on the bridge within an hour of the beginning of the afternoon watch. They had let him sleep; there was no reason why he shouldn't have slept. Crowther had his own master's license, and should have known enough to shift the course.

The actual facts Wain could guess as well as Crowther knew them. Crowther had been enjoying the afternoon watch so well he had not wished to give it up, so well that he had forgotten or neglected to make his own shift in the course.

The name of the cause of the joy sprang

to his lips, to mingle with the fearsome profanity. But his eyes had given another pained, beseeching, sidewise glance past his shoulder. The skipper turned enough to see the look on Miss Bascom's face; and her name and the further profanity died abruptly, as if he had suffered a sudden stroke of paralysis.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bascom," Wain muttered thickly. "I didn't know you were here." He started to blush; turned white instead. For the second time that day he seemed to slump toward years past sixty. Most men had been accustomed to take Captain Wain for fifty. During this voyage he had got to looking hardly more than the forty-one which was his actual age.

The other time he had looked old, had been when he left the bridge at four bells of the morning watch. There had been only one reason in the world for his relieving the mate of the first half of that watch. Miss Bascom had expressed the wish the previous evening to see the sun rise.

To avoid the extra tolls for passengers, freight steamers frequently list those going through the Canal as extra officers—fourth assistant engineers and superfluous stewards and such. It had been Wain himself who had evolved the fact that Miss Bascom, as third stewardess, could sit on the bridge without violating the company rule against passengers being up there.

Miss Bascom was going home to America with her father, long an agent in Shanghai for the company that operated the South Sea and Orient trading ships. The ships are stanch tramps, plying the Seven Seas, but mostly the Pacific. Old John Bascom wanted to reach New York without paying railroad fares from Frisco. He had waited for the *Famura San*, destined to finish its itinerary by crossing the Atlantic. A devious voyage she had made thus far. It was two whole months since they had cleared from Shanghai.

In those two months Captain Wain had fought the folly of love at his age; love had won the fight. Slowly but surely his will and mind had yielded to pleas that he was hardly over forty, she possibly a shade past twenty-five.

Love had beaten him; and he was glory-

ing in his defeat. Even when he doubted his courage ever to declare his sentiments to the lady of his heart, he joyously acknowledged that the possession of the sentiment was the biggest thing his all too empty life had held.

For there had been but one other love in that life. It had come when he was even younger and in the next lower position than his mate, Mr. Crowther. And he had been sitting beside a bright eyed girl in a nook behind a lifeboat, bedazzled in silver-hazed moonlight at five bells of the first watch, a quartermaster on the bridge where he should have been, a sailor at the wheel—when the ship struck an iceberg. Never in this world would he know whether he might have saved that ship or not had he been at his post of duty.

Twenty years of mental torture; twenty years of outliving the truthful and the exaggerated rumors that bound his name with the catastrophe in every port and every cabin where deep-sea-going men congregated—had been twenty years of penance for Captain Wain. It had taken nineteen of those years and an emergency to give him the *Famura San*, such a ship as he might have commanded within four years but for his one dereliction. The inward penalties had been worse. It was a decade since a stranger had guessed his age under fifty. He had long had to remind himself that he was younger than that.

But now who could blame him if he questioned whether his penance had not been sufficient, if he snatched eagerly at the last few years remaining, before the actual date of his birth would turn any thoughts of romance into symptoms of dotage in the eyes of the world and his own?

And this morning Miss Bascom had watched the sun rise. It had been a splendid sunrise for him. He had seen it—mostly as reflected in her eyes. For him no sky could have held the beauty of color her cheeks had acquired during the healthful, restful months out of Shanghai. He had been telling himself a hundred times since that those two hours of the morning watch had been colorful enough to brighten the dun gray of the score of years just finished and another score that might come.

But the telling had not convinced his heart to make it really joyful. At the end of those two hours, Mr. Crowther had come to relieve him. And the bright eyes had turned upon the younger man, and the cheeks had gained a heightened hue—and the skipper had seen his mistake.

Certainly, as seamen go, Captain Wain had never been a drinking man. But he had gone down from the bridge feeling very old and very tired—much older than the worst of the usual guesses at his age, much more tired than many nights on the bridge had ever made him. And he was experienced enough in heartache to know that sleep is its best anodyne.

He knew that, for him, alcohol offered sleep. For real drinkers it gives sleep only as stupor. The fact that the little he had drunk had kept him asleep longer than he had intended is but proof that his system was not inured to liquor. He had not been drunk, even when he slept. A call would have brought him to the bridge and to competent command of his ship. At his first waking glance at his watch, confident of Crowther's capability, he had been only glad that he had escaped another two hours of waking with his fresh misery.

He had allowed himself no resentment or jealousy. He had blamed neither the man nor the girl. He had been foolish; he but recognized the fact and suffered for it. He could take it like a man.

Even after he had got outside and discovered Crowther's awful blunder, he listened to the counsel of mercy. It is little wonder that the angels rejoice over the sinner repentant; he is so much kindlier a man than the righteous without need of repentance. Captain Wain swore at his mate—because he already had determined to do no worse by the delinquent. He was not really letting his wrath get out of hand until Crowther uttered an excuse unmanly because it was knowingly insufficient.

Then he saw what had tempted Crowther to utter that excuse—and he excused its making. His wrath died. He blushed with shame that she should have heard his words. But he went white as his own muttered apologies reminded him of the peril she shared with all on board.

Let her sympathy go with her love; let her believe well of her beloved; let her think the ill of himself. He turned to the hopeless, futile efforts to save the ship.

He knew they were hopeless and futile. The superpower of a dreadnought might possibly push a vessel into the teeth of the wind which was rising by the second, and would reach the proportions of a tornado in minutes. The single engine that gave the *Famura San* nine knots would be insufficient to keep her from dragging her heaviest anchors astern or snapping their chains.

But the useless motions must be made. Crowther had already started them. The ship was headed due east, away from the dangerous shore. The Chinamen were pouring up from the forecabin in response to the boatswain's whistle. Crowther dropped down the stair and ran forward to his place while the skipper's last word was spoken to the girl.

Wain's orders were mechanical. One might almost have thought he had not fully wakened from his too long sleep. There was one of the eight passengers who, alarmed at first by the swift cries of the crew, but listening then to the skipper's voice, remarked:

"Guess he doesn't think it's going to be very bad—just taking precautions against possible danger."

"I don't like that island behind us," argued another.

He would have liked it less had he known it more. Its name is probably but a dialectic variation of the Filipino's *Yaua*, the word for "devil." It would appear to an airman like the usual atoll provided with a pair of horns. These lengthen the eastward coastline.

Though its highest point would hardly shield a small yacht's mast from a blow, its windward shore drops to deep water like the side of a mountain. There is scarcely a patch of beach as big as a bedsheet from one horn's tip to the other. The pounding waves have on the other hand washed ugly caverns into the low cliffs.

But the unfriendly coastline is the least dangerous feature of this ugly island's windward shore. About half a mile in

front of it, and running from the northern horn-tip almost to the middle of the crude circle behind, full half the length of the whole stretch, extends a submerged, serrated reef. A small launch in water no rougher than the trade-wind keeps things almost perpetually, might cross this anywhere without knowing it had done so. Only in the heaviest storms is the reef's presence marked by any surf. But for ships drawing seventeen or eighteen feet of water, it is as deadly a trap as Satan could invent. If there is a space in its length through which a ship's width could be squeezed without tearing a plate or plank from her bottom, no chart-maker has discovered it.

And yet one more peril goes to spoil this unfortunate island. It is in the form of a breach in the wall of the island's front, giving entrance to the lagoon. It all but ruins the latter as a harbor. Above the general water-level, it is wide enough to let the wind blast through. Below it is hardly more than ten feet across, shallow enough to wade over if it were ever still, so full of bowlders it would be foolhardy to attempt it at the best it ever gets. It serves principally to let the breakers send their tops into the lagoon in every storm with sufficient force to make any ship uneasy. As a matter of fact, ships never enter the fine gateway on the western side of the lagoon at all; they accept the better shelter behind the northern weatherward horn.

So far as is known, there is just one boat that can get through that breach in the wall unscathed. A chief's son, M'nawah by name, devised it; possibly with some stray Down East dory as a model. He and his brother, L'nawah, superbly skillful surfmen, maintain their prowess amongst the score and a half inhabitants of the island by demonstrating over and over that they can pass through "Hell Inlet" not merely in ordinary weather, but in anything the sea can stir up to hinder them.

There is only one thing more to say of Wa'yau Island. It repays the hardihood of its tiny group of inhabitants with some of the richest pearl-fishing in the Pacific. The Famura San was booked to stop there; but of course behind the horn instead of in

its present position, where her stop was certain to be permanent.

Too close upon it and too far down to have the slightest hope of beating back northward around the end of the reef, Wain spent every effort to get beyond its southern tip.

That would not save his ship. Spared the reef, she must but drive ashore beyond. It would afford a chance for some of her hardier passengers and members of a crew to clamber the rocks, a little protected by the hull from the waves' fury. For the two Malay women, for Miss Bascom, for old men like her father, like himself—it would be no chance at all. But to take the life-boats on the reef and across the half mile of crazy water behind it would be no chance for anybody.

And so he gave no order to the mate, waiting at the hawsers to let the anchors go. He ran on, always headed a little southward, long after Mr. Hupper had taken in the taffrail-log to keep its backed up line from the propellers. He was working southward, though creeping back to westward and the hidden rocks.

But he had to give this up at length and take the last forlorn hope—a dash directly to the south, with the wind and waves sluing the steamer broadside at the rocks as she ran—

Not much for a captain of a ship in it all—a bare chance to save a few of the lives when his vessel went down in circumstances for which his world of seamen would hold him responsible, however little he might be to blame for it. No other man is so nearly a king as the master of a vessel. But no other man must bear a heavier responsibility for the very existence of his domain and the safety of every one of his temporary subjects. The failures of his subordinates may be punished by himself or by the maritime courts; but he is still responsible for permitting them to fail. And Wain knew that he was done for.

"Starboard helm," he commanded the Chinaman at the wheel. The words were a sigh of surrender of hope. He turned to the engine-room telegraph and pleaded for just a little more steam. The Scotchman down in the ship's bowels must have be-

lieved he hoped to save the vessel, but the Chinaman knew he had no hope at all.

"God!" he gasped, as he saw how the ship rushed broadside at the shore. He had calculated it all as well as man might; but the sight of it scared him. For an instant an order to steer back hung on his lips. But he had done all of that he could.

There are seconds that seem hours, minutes that drag into eternities. Wain lived through a lot of such now. And he got to the spot where a surge of bubbles showed the last point of rock beneath. And it was seventy-five yards to leeward of his bow.

His hands gripped the spokes of the wheel. As the danger spot passed amidships, half the distance between it and the ship had vanished. He swung the wheel down to throw the stern a little farther off, though it must point him fairly at the coast line below.

And three-quarters of the ship's length swung her so close he listened for the crash. It was the forward fling of a wave that had carried the vessel in; she was swept off again a little more, as the ship dropped down the back of the water ridge.

He shook his head. The thing could not be done. He needed six seconds to finish passing; four would bring on the next wave and shiver the afterquarter on the jagged point. It came. Up, up the vessel rose, riding broadside to the wave—up and in upon the froth that marked where the bottom of the last billow's trough had surged over bare rock.

As the ship hung there on the very crest of the breaker a bare fraction of a second, Wain's eyes, turned aft, seemed to photograph every face of passengers and crew, save the half watch waiting with Crowther in the bow for orders to let go the anchors. He read their very thoughts and saw the white fear written on their cheeks.

Yet it was fear for the shore beyond. They did not know that the crash was but a half second away—they were in terror for what he might have hoped to escape for a quarter of an hour. He had an awful feeling that they should be warned; it sickened him to think of the start they would give.

Only two understood—Mr. Hupper, already with his men at the starboard after

lifeboat—and Miss Bascom. Her gaze was bent over the rail and astern.

The ship came down with that awful lurch which wrings the vitals of the seasick; now a thousand times more awful to the husky seaman who knew she was dropping for the last time.

Down—down—

The breath seemed to leave his lungs. For an instant he felt his knees giving beneath him. He could not think of the things he had planned to do—the swift outward swing again, the orders to let the anchors run. He was battling with relief so great it hurt.

For the ship had missed. He could account for it only by believing the rock much deeper than he had guessed, and the wave high enough to sweep his ship clear over it.

Then the relief turned to a vast joy. Perhaps he could save them all. He would not let the anchors go. It was not fated that these should die on the rocks. Another race on down the front of the island; another close shave, perhaps, with the nearer rock at the entrance—and he would jam her bow into the inlet itself. And the ship would stick there—half of her, at least, long enough for all aboard to leap ashore to dry land.

"Forward!—all hands forward!" he shrieked down the length of the steamer. "Forward—for—"

They went forward—sprawling, stumbling, face down on the steel deck. His own word was cut in half as he was hurled from his feet into the rail of the bridge at the forward edge. There had been another rock—and the *Famura San* had hit it.

The charts do not show each point of a rocky ledge like that. They mark the reef; and mariners keep away if they can.

Pulling himself to his feet, Wain turned in sheer amazement and stared at the bow of his ship where the crash had sounded. Already the next wave was lifting her from what she had hit. Once more he saw in a second what he might ordinarily have seen by several minutes of careful study. He marked Crowther's hands, moving in a gesture of despair; he somehow felt that, could Crowther survive what must follow, it would be to accuse him of doing the wrong thing

in making this attempt to wreck his vessel ashore instead of the hopeless one to ride the blow out at anchor. He felt almost elated that Crowther would never live to talk.

And he saw, beyond Crowther, beyond the raised bulwark at the forepeak, clear over the shore's edge, between two of the scant palm-trees on it, the comparatively placid water of the one safe but shallow corner of the lagoon. An odd-shaped canoe was being swiftly paddled by two all but naked brown men from the shore.

The ship came down again. The second crash was more terrific than the first. The stern settled still more than the bow.

"Forward!" he tried to yell again, but without the hope that had given him voice before. The shrieking gale seemed to bite off his hoarse croak at his very lips. He saw that the afterport stay of the smoke-stack had parted. The great iron chimney went clean overboard without touching a head.

The sea itself did what his voice could no longer do. A huge wave caught the port afterquarter. It hurled vast tubfuls of water across and along the deck. The yellow sailors, Mr. Hupper, the passengers—scrambled forward to escape further ducking. But there was to be no such escape. The rain began abruptly, great sheets of it sweeping in almost horizontal lines across the deck. It beat husky Chinamen into the leeward rail. The passengers came along it as if pulled by a rope.

The stokers and engineers seemed fairly belched from the companionway to the hold in a cloud of steam that told better than Wain could guess as yet how fast the vessel was filling. He took the ladder down from the bridge almost in a leap.

He was in time to head off the most of the jam into the passage leading through the forward deckhouse to the other deck.

"Passengers only," he snapped. "Mr. Hupper, take the starboard boat here. Twenty-one."

"The starboard boat, sir," the second mate repeated in a croak barely audible above the roar. He took his command as his sentence to death. The forward boat on that side would be a little safer to launch,

would offer a shade more hope for clearing the wreck. The eight passengers went on through the passage. Hupper drew a pistol from his pocket.

"Use it if you have to—but you won't," Wain ordered. He was about to turn into the passage when he saw Miss Bascom.

"Passengers forward," he bade her.

"But I am not a passenger," she objected. At this moment the jest which had given her the privilege of the bridge seemed almost blasphemous. They were too near death for humor.

"You forward, then," he commanded, and thrust her before him. They came out on the forward deck.

Crowther and his half-watch of men, together with some who had come through, already had the boat nearly swung out into position. Wain needed to wait but two seconds before he could take command here himself.

"The ladies first—and all aboard this boat. We can't launch another. Quick, please!—*Passengers* first!" One of the Chinamen had leaped aboard. He leaped out. He was the only member of that yellow crew who forgot the precedents for life-chance on a ship.

Two women—all there were aboard, save Miss Bascom—were lifted bodily into the boat. Both were wives of Malay passengers. Their husbands quickly followed.

"Women first!" Crowther snarled at the second of them. And, for the second time, Miss Bascom used her privilege as a member of the ship's company—

"*Passengers* first!" she protested. "I'm an officer."

"The dev—" cried the mate. But Wain turned upon him.

"Let her wait if she will," he ordered.

"What—what—By Heaven! I'll kill you if—" Crowther did not know what it meant. He broke off, guessing that his guess was too wild. It was. He had thought the captain meant to keep the girl aboard and die with her. There was that in Wain's eyes which silenced further guesses.

"My daughter!" It was Mr. Bascom, the father, with one foot in the boat, who awoke now to the situation. But the one

other white passenger on the ship was close behind and in a frantic panic. He pushed Bascom over the gunwale. The older man's head struck one of the seats. He lay still in the bottom.

The Chinese crew piled in as one man. The chief engineer and his second assistant followed.

"Eighteen Persons," the legend ran on the boat's side. Twenty were in it. Its builders had designed it against overcrowding. One more person could be got aboard, and only one.

It would seem as if Wain had already stretched the capacity of the human mind to balk the limits of time. If he had crowded the thinking of hours into seconds, of weeks into minutes, during the past ten of these—he now made the decision of a lifetime in a fraction of a second. He would never know how he did it.

For his eye had flashed far enough forward to find the mouth of Hell's Inlet through the blinding sheets of rain. And he had seen what he sought to see—the nose of an odd-shaped canoe, shooting upward and outward over the very peak of a breaker.

It could be but one boat in the world; it could come through there only by the power of two men in the world. It was the strange canoe of M'nawah and his brother, L'nawah. Once more they were proving their defiant superiority to the might of the gods.

And that canoe could give two passengers such a chance as Wain knew neither of the lifeboats could approach. Two years ago he had watched those princelets drive their craft out that inlet and in again, in a squall hardly less severe than this. And they had carried a barrel two-thirds full of water, to show they could do it; and had come back and added a second barrel to make their wild stunt a shade wilder. They had tried a third barrel, and upset in the lagoon.

The lifeboats had no chance. The ship itself, piled up on the rocks, might have dumped its passengers almost ashore. The smaller craft would be in splinters and all aboard pounding their lives out on the rough boulders.

But two might be saved. Two—the cap-

tain and the lady! He must be the last to leave the sinking vessel. The coasts of the seven seas would resound with his shame if he boarded the lifeboat and left the girl or his mate aboard the ship. Two would live. There was hardly a danger that the ship would slide off tail down in ten minutes; hardly a hope that she would wait twenty. Twelve would suffice for those two superb young Tritons to reach her.

Two would live. He might be willing to die. But to die leaving his memory blackened by the last stigma of coward's shame a seaman's name may suffer—when he might live with the credit of having fulfilled every obligation of courage, when he might even hope to win love with his rival off the earth—that was too much to ask of any man.

Crowther was lifting Miss Bascom into the boat. He touched her cheek with his lips. She did not offer objection. Wain did—

"An officer must go with that boat," he spoke crisply.

Crowther stared at him in sheer amaze. Once more there must have flashed through his brain the wild notion that the skipper wanted to share death with the girl.

"I'm damned if—"

"Very well, I'll go," Wain broke in with the answer.

Crowther's look of amaze took on a different hue. In it Wain might discern just what all the world would think of him and say of him within two days. The mate was speechless with a man's loathing for a coward.

"I'll stay with you, John," Miss Bascom whispered.

"Lower away," Wain ordered the men in the lifeboat. He sank from the view of John Crowther clasping the girl to his breast, their love confessing itself in the face of a death that they would know in ten minutes might be deferred for years.

There is one thing about Captain Wain I have not told. It did not belong in the story up to this point. It belongs here now.

When he was ashore he used, as I think is the manner of most seamen of the better

sort, to go to church occasionally. He tried to join in the services like everybody else. Somehow he never could. When he tried to pray, the memory of that ship his recklessness had sunk years ago rose up to stop him. He could not quite believe that God would hear him. He felt as if it would be blasphemous impertinence for him to speak to God.

Of course he was all wrong. Any priest or minister could have told him better, could have shown him, right out of the Bible, that a penitent sinner has the best chance in the world with a prayer. Perhaps a very wise one might have thought that his utter humiliation was, in itself, the best sort of prayer.

When the lifeboat reached the water, Wain hardly knew what he had done or how he had done it. Somehow he felt that it was all so tremendously right that he must be wrong about it. Yet he could not keep down an exultation which made it hard for him from raising his voice in song.

Then the exultation died. The lifeboat had been pushed clear of the ship's protection. He realized how little he had really done; he came back to consciousness of the forty-two lives he had not saved; he looked down that coast with the breakers smashing themselves upon its rough rocks; he saw that the canoe was making good headway, but he saw with deeper interest now, that no lifeboat could ever land on that shore and a man aboard survive. Of course they hadn't a chance on the earth or the waters of the earth to skirt it four miles to the south and around behind it. The steamer couldn't keep off those rocks with its power. No oarsmen could.

And, in that utter helplessness of the most futile of all his gestures at saving his company he became suddenly conscious that he was praying with all his might. He didn't know what prayer he was saying; he couldn't think of another when he did. It was "Now I lay me down to sleep."

But it somehow seemed all right to him now to pray, and he kept it up.

I don't say that the wind changed on that account. You can write your own ticket about that. You can say that a cyclone like that would whirl anyhow, and

that, down there, ten degrees below the equator, its next quarter must naturally have been the north. But I can't help feeling that, if Heaven ever would hear a man pray, it would be somebody who had just done something like the more-than-life sacrifice Wain had made. Besides, if the wind was going to change as soon as that anyhow, it makes a mess of my story. He might have saved the ship and everything by getting off as far as he could, anchoring, and helping the anchors hold with the engine. It wouldn't have dragged ashore as quickly as the wind changed.

Anyhow, it did change. It blew the two lifeboats down the shore of Wa'yau's southern horn; and getting up behind it was no great trick. The shift spoiled the fine stunt of the M'nawah brothers, too. It couldn't be done in a cross wind. They had to slide down the shore and around it—their lighter craft led the way home by a mile or more.

When Captain Wain had his last passenger and the last member of his crew ashore, he quit praying. There wasn't much he might pray for the others now; there wasn't anything he could imagine heaven giving him. He was an old sea-captain who had lost his ship again, and who had topped everything by deserting the wreck with other lives aboard. He couldn't shift the responsibility for the loss; or prove anything but cowardice in the desertion. In his ears still rang the curses Bascom had heaped upon him when the father had come to after his stunning bump and discovered that the daughter had been left on the ship.

Bascom had influence with the company. Wain would never have another ship; he could never make a living again; his eyes ached and burned in the rain; he thought his sight was failing; he felt seventy; he wished he were ninety and had died at three score and ten. He dropped at the foot of a swaying, dripping palm and closed his eyes and wished for sleep. The rest went on without him, to the chief's house.

He woke up with a start. Around his neck were damp sleeves; before his eyes blurred two brighter, younger eyes; close to his lips two other lips whispered:

"Thank God! I thought I had lost

you. My captain! Oh, what a mistake I almost made!"

"You—you what?" he gasped; for the lips had momentarily shut off his breath.

"Don't—darling. I'm an old man, and no good, and can't ever get a ship again and—"

"You're a big and a brave man," she interrupted. "I know it now."

"You know—what?" Wain faltered.

"You—you—I know why you left us on that ship—because you thought it was our only chance for life; because you wanted to give it to us, even when you had to die in disgrace and shame for it.

"Yes—you did it because you loved me. I've had enough of conventions—trying to make myself love a man because he was nearer my age than the man I wanted to love.

"And then I knew I couldn't. It was when you were going down into that life-boat—yes, before I saw the canoe coming through. Even then I knew I had made a mistake. I knew I was losing a man who was doing something big and fine—something poor Crowther could never do in a hundred years.

"What do I care if you're fifty? Why, it must take fifty years to make a man like you. I don't care if you're old as Methuselah. But—

"Why—why—you're getting younger looking. I don't believe you're much over forty. I'm—not so far from thirty myself. Aren't you going to propose to me?"

"How can I? I can't get a ship—can't support you," he protested vaguely.

But he was wrong about that. Maybe what he did when he got off the *Famura San* wasn't enough to give him any special drag on heaven. But, when Mr. Bascom understood it, it got a heavy grip on him. And Mr. Bascom has a drag with the South Sea and Orient Company.

And, what with the company's backing and Mr. Crowther's straightforward confession, Wain kept his ticket. He kept Mr. Crowther, too.

Of course, that doesn't exactly fix the mate up in the matter of love. But it saves him the prospect of twenty years' penance such as Wain had endured. As a matter of fact, Crowther is engaged to another girl already.



by Courtenay Savage

IT was quarter to eleven when Murray McHugh reached the Grand Central Terminal from his home in the foot-hills of the Berkshires. He was due at his uncle's Wall Street office at twelve for luncheon—also, so he hoped, for a position.

"Now, don't be late," his mother had

cautioned with her good-by, "you know how fussy your Uncle Dan is about being on time."

Murray remembered. He did not like his Uncle Dan, who was one of those crusty, oversuccessful men who have little patience with youth—especially youth such as Mur-

ray typified—five foot ten, good looking, twenty-five and not a pronounced business success. Murray had studied to be a private secretary after leaving high school, but among his other jobs had been a partnership in a public garage. He had held three different positions as "private secretary" and he had served in the navy during the war. Not such a bad record, but one that Uncle Dan thought spelled "shiftless."

However, Uncle Dan had offered to help him get a responsible place in Wall Street, and they were to talk it over at luncheon. And he was going to be punctual. So he hurried down toward the subway, ran down the stairs, and got into the last car of the express.

The car was practically empty, for it was an "off" hour. Across the aisle from him sat a large, rather loudly dressed man, who looked as if he were of foreign extraction—Russian or Pole, Murray decided. As the train started Murray saw that the man's gaze was fixed toward his side of the car. He had noticed that there was a girl not so many feet from where he sat, and as the man's eyes grew insolent, Murray glanced, half casually, in her direction.

His heart gave the thump that any normal male heart would give. Gee, she was pretty! Young, and well dressed, she looked more like a limousine than the subway. Trying not to be rude, Murray kept on looking, and he saw that the man across the aisle also continued to look.

Instinctively, he moved just a trifle closer to the girl. He didn't like that man. He noticed, among other things, that he carried a large, almost square cigar-box, which he held with great care. A second glance, however, told him that it was not a real cigar-box, but one that had been manufactured from cigar-box wood. Murray wondered.

The young woman had opened her handbag and had taken out a small pad of paper and a pencil. The man across the aisle seemed to lean forward as if to watch her more closely. Murray also watched; he could not help it. Once she looked quickly in his direction, a searching glance, that seemed both smiling and appealing. Then she began to trace little figures on her

pad. When she had finished one sheet, she tore it off, and crumpled it. She started on her second sheet just as the train reached Fourteenth Street.

No one entered their car. When she had finished the second page of sketches, she slanted the pad, so that Murray could see. It was as if she did it purposely and again his heart gave a leap. They were stenographic notes that she had written, and she "wrote the same system" as he did.

I am in danger—follow me.

When she saw that he understood, she sent him another of those quick, appealing smiles. She crumpled the piece of paper, threw it aside and started scribbling on the third. The train pulled into Brooklyn Bridge station. The girl rose, so did the man. The girl stepped aside to let the man precede her. Then, with a swift glance at Murray, who was still debating as to just what he should do, she tossed toward his lap the third sheet of the pad. He picked it up and hurried after the girl, down the long platform, and up the stairs to the street. The man was just in front of him. Murray glanced at the note. It was in shorthand.

Please keep following me and when I reach the settlement house, come in. If this man should attack me, run away for your own sake.

He deciphered this note as he reached the street. The girl walked off toward the congested district of the city to the north of Brooklyn Bridge. She walked rapidly, and Murray saw her glance from left to right, as if to make sure that he was following. The man, after having hesitated a moment at the top of the subway stairs, had started after the girl. Murray lagged slightly, so as to let the man come opposite him. Then he kept pace.

The strange procession continued for several blocks. They had passed the great warehouses, and were in the congested tenement district, with its squalid little shops, cellarways, where goods were displayed, and where peddlers lined the curb. It was rather a fearsome district, the slums, of which

Murray had read, but never seen. Women in odd, soiled clothing, that had once been gay, stood in doorways and chatted noisily. Children screamed and sprawled over the sidewalks as they played, or darted in and out among the traffic.

Murray hurried his steps. He had noted the glances that were sent in the direction of the girl as she hurried along—quick, heavy glances that were generally followed by nudges, and comments in strange tongues.

By this time the girl was only a few feet in front of him, the man who followed her was perhaps a dozen paces behind. They started across the street. A couple of heavy trucks swung around the corner. Those on the street scattered toward the curb. Murray saw that he and the girl were safe on the farther side; the man was held behind by the swarm of traffic. It was Murray's opportunity. He raced to the girl's side.

"Can't we dodge in somewhere?"

The girl looked at him with frightened eyes.

"He's caught back there by the traffic—it's a chance—in a doorway—anywhere."

The girl understood. Even though her features were drawn with fright, she was very beautiful. Murray felt vaguely that he had seen her somewhere—perhaps she was one of those dream creatures that he had read about.

"Yes—come," and she darted up the steps of the nearest tenement. He followed. It was the old-fashioned type, with a hall that ran from the front door to another at the rear of the building. Beyond was a squalid backyard. It was to this place that the girl led the way. They dodged out of sight and waited. In one corner of the littered yard Murray saw a piece of heavy wood. He picked it up. After all, a stout stick had proved valuable in many an encounter.

A couple of minutes passed in silence. Nothing happened.

"Had we better stay here?" Murray asked. He had been studying his companion. She was dark, with large black eyes, and soft hair that curved about her temples. She was not tall, but there was a

grace and dignity in her youthful carriage. She was quietly, but very handsomely dressed—perhaps it was the richness of her clothing that had made them look at her.

"No," she told him quickly. "I guess not. But we can go down through these yards. You see, there are no fences, and we can come out by another building."

"Yes, that would help if he were watching the front door."

She smiled at him sweetly, and again she took the lead. They went to the end of the row.

"Perhaps we had better wait a few minutes longer?" she suggested.

"Yes. And I'll hold on to this weapon. Or maybe you would like me to get a policeman?"

"Oh, no, I don't want that," she told him quickly. Then, after a second: "I suppose you wonder what it is all about? It's very good of you to help me like this. I have no right to place you in any danger—yet—"

"I'm very happy if I can be of assistance," Murray hurried to assure her.

"And I suppose that I ought to call the police, but—I was panic-stricken there in the subway. I took a chance that you would understand the same system of shorthand—so many people know stenography these days. You see, I am on my way to a settlement house. It isn't very often that I can go there personally and work among the women and children, but when the opportunity affords, I give them part of every day. I used to live in this section of the city; I think I understand what these people need to make them real citizens."

"You used to live here?" Her statement hardly fitted in with her appearance.

"Yes, I was quite poor once, very poor. My father was a Scotchman, and a sailor. My mother was an Italian, a singer before my father met her in an Italian seaport and married her. Then they settled here in New York, and when I was a little girl my father died, and my mother had to work for us. We came down here to live—it was so much cheaper. I had a brother several years older than I was, and he was a splendid chap. There were a great many gangs down here then—killers, the scum of the

earth congested in the slums. When a reform movement started to clean up the city, my brother did his part down here. He became employed as a detective, and helped in sending to jail a lot of the worst characters, men who committed the most revolting crimes with a smile. The gangs said that they would kill him, and they did. It broke my mother's heart, and after she died, I moved away. I'm not poor any more, and I have been trying to help—but—I think that some of the old gang spirit is left—there is so much lawlessness, and—"

"And—you're afraid that they will kill you?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"They might."

"How long have you been followed? I suppose this is not the first time?"

"No, I saw that man outside the settlement yesterday morning. He followed me home, I think. I am sure that I have seen him before—up-town—near my apartment."

"Well, hadn't I better get a taxi and send you home? And don't you think you had better have some one to guard you?"

"Yes, and the settlement house is on the next block. I will phone for a taxicab when we get there."

They went into the hall and so toward the front door. A couple of children who were entering the tenement stopped and looked at them with wondering eyes. A man coming down the stairs stood still, and gazed after them, frowning heavily. There was something so menacing about the atmosphere of the place that Murray hurried her to the sidewalk. She took his arm. In his right hand he still held the heavy stick.

"It's just at the end of the next block," she told him, and they hastened their footsteps.

The settlement house occupied the two first floor apartments of a tenement. They almost ran up the steps, and into the room that was used as an office.

"Oh, Miss Brinker," the girl with Murray cried, "I've seen that man again. This gentleman has protected me, and—you'd better call a taxi. I'm afraid that I should never have come here, but I thought they had all forgotten."

"You poor dear, you're all excited," was the calm reply of the head of the settlement. She was a large woman, no longer young, but with a kindly face which was at the minute inclined to smile. "Nothing will hurt you here," she went on softly. "I'll call a cab, and this young gentleman will take you home. You had better not come again." She went across the room to the telephone, and after looking at her pad, asked for a number. The girl sat huddled on a bench. Murray rested his stick against the wall and stepped toward the curtained windows.

And then the door opened suddenly, with a swiftness that startled them all. The girl jumped to her feet with a low cry of horror. It was the man of the subway train. He was still carrying the square box.

"What do you want here?" Murray demanded. "What do you mean by disturbing this lady? Now, get out, quick!"

The man was a couple of inches taller than Murray, and at least twenty pounds heavier, but Murray was game.

"Listen, you butt out of this," the man said roughly. "I'm here for my reason and it's no business of yours. I ain't going to hurt you, lady, nor you, young fellow, if you don't get fresh. I lost you for a couple of minutes, but I come on here, thinking you'd sure show up. I was only sent here to get—" He held the box before him, and lifted one side.

Murray thought of bombs, and other such things. With a rush he was on the man and the box went flying across the room, and crashed through the window. Murray was startled at his own action, and in the instant of silence that followed the tinkling of breaking glass, he waited for what he feared might be an explosion. None came.

What did come was a quick blow that sent Murray reeling across the room. He recovered himself instantly, and rushed back. He saw against the wall the heavy stick he had been carrying, but he could not reach it. Instead he sent his fists to the left and right. He was young, quick, and athletic. His clean strength came to his aid, and his blows were as hot rain. They came so rapidly and Murray dodged so perfectly

that the big man could hardly seem to find him. Once he grabbed Murray by the collar, as if to choke him, but a couple of quick jabs ended that hold.

The settlement worker rushed past the two men toward the street. Her smiling expression had vanished. She knew when to smile and when to act quickly. This was the moment for a policeman.

Just what would have happened if an officer had not been half a block away is problematical, for Murray was becoming winded, and the big man, even though he was bruised and battered, had the strength of a stone wall. He was far from being down and out.

The man in uniform, however, made it a different type of argument. Murray quit fighting when he appeared, and looked quickly toward the girl. The big man took advantage to deliver one last punch, which, like the first, sent Murray reeling, this time into the policeman's arms.

"He come at me—and—" the big man began.

"Shut up!" remarked the policeman, and there was force in his command. The settlement worker explained quickly.

"This lady and gentleman were followed here by this man. This lady is one of the chief supporters of the settlement, and the young gentleman is her friend. This man has annoyed the lady before. A few minutes ago he burst in here, and the young gentleman defended himself and us."

"Say—say—I was sent down here to—"

"Keep quiet!" commanded the officer. "You can tell your story to the judge. And you'd better come along as a witness." This to Murray.

"Oh, no, please, I want him to take me home," the girl interposed. "Please—you don't have to have him, do you?" She was very agitated. The policeman looked from Murray, who was decidedly ruffled in appearance, but otherwise quite the master of the situation, to Miss Brinker, who was calmly awaiting the outcome of the situation, then at the girl, who seemed nearly on the verge of a collapse, and finally at the big man. There were two or three lumps beginning to appear on the latter's face, and one ear showed signs of a scratch.

"You sure hit him, didn't you?" The policeman could not help smiling at the difference between this dapper youth and his assailant.

"Yes, he did." Miss Brinker was quite proud. "And, officer, is there any reason why I could not go to court and press the charge of disorderly conduct—this man started the fight in the settlement house. I know that this—young lady needs to be taken home."

"Well, if you think it's best," was the officer's judgment. "Come on, you—" And very unceremoniously he dragged the bewildered man after him. Miss Brinker reached for her hat and coat and made the third of the procession to the police station.

"Your taxi is here," she called from the door. "I'll be up-town to-morrow, and I'll run in to see you—good-by." And she hurried away.

"Shall we go now?" Murray asked. The girl nodded, and they went out through the little crowd that had collected to the waiting taxi. The girl gave an address and the driver started the car.

For several minutes they rode in silence, the girl huddled close to Murray, while unconsciously he held one of her hands in his. Gradually the color came back to her cheeks. It did not seem unnatural that her head should rest on his shoulder, or that he should hold her hand.

As they hurried uptown Murray began to realize that it must be getting late, and that his appointment was for twelve sharp. He looked at his watch—it was five minutes to twelve now. He would be very late.

The girl noted his swift look of concern.

"What is it?" she asked quickly.

"I had an appointment for twelve—I ought to leave you—and try and make it."

"But—you couldn't go anywhere looking as you do. Your collar is torn, and your tie—and you need to get washed and brushed up. You can phone from my apartment, and I'll send my maid out for a fresh collar and tie."

She was right. He could telephone. Still the frown persisted, and wrinkled his forehead.

It was just ten minutes after twelve when they reached her apartment.

"Tell me the size and the name of your collar, and I'll send the maid right out—you can telephone." She commanded, and he obeyed. Now that she had reached the safety of her own home she seemed quite at ease. Murray looked up his uncle's phone number, and gave it to Central. He waited. The wire was busy. He called again. Six precious minutes had passed. Still busy. Another delay. At twenty minutes past twelve he was connected with his uncle's office. His uncle had just left, and would be back in an hour.

"I'm awfully sorry—I can't tell you how sorry. But—won't you stay and have lunch with me? Please do. You can come back here, and get washed up. Nannie will have your fresh collar in a minute or so."

The girl smiled so sweetly that Murray's heart gave a great jump, and all the annoyance that he felt at having missed the appointment momentarily vanished. Murray smiled back at her, and the world was very bright.

He had washed, brushed his clothes, put on the new collar and tie, and was starting toward the living-room, when there was an excited ring at the bell, a sound that made him start, and brought both the girl and the maid to the door. The maid opened the door cautiously, as if afraid. Then with a low laugh she stepped aside to let a man pass.

"Oh, it's you, Woody!" And there was great relief in the girl's voice when she recognized her visitor.

"Yes, I rushed right over as soon as I heard."

"Heard? Heard what?"

"About the mess with Comsky. I'm afraid that a lot of it is my fault—but you mustn't get angry."

"Comsky? Your fault?"

"Yes, the man who followed you. He's sort of a near private detective. You see, I knew that you were doing something for the poor there on the East Side whenever you weren't working on a picture, and I knew darn well that you would never stand for it being made the subject of a cheap publicity story, so I had him trail you, and get all the dope. He reported to the publicity department, and said that he could

get, without your knowing, a picture of you. He had a camera hidden in a box, and it's a whale of a story—and—we told him to go ahead. I never dreamed that he would use such rough methods."

"Publicity!" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes—now, listen, don't get mad. You know, we need all the good legitimate stuff we can get to put the pictures across big—why—"

"Well, I ought to get mad," she broke in. "You gave me a terrible fright. Why—" And she suddenly remembered Murray. "Oh, this is the young man who saved me. And I made him miss a very important engagement—just because you wanted to put all my private life in the papers."

"Well, it would have made a good story, but now—" Woody laughed. "Gee whiz! Comsky told the whole yarn in court, and that settlement worker got mad, and I had to telephone for a lawyer to go right downtown to explain, and every paper in the city will give it space as real news. As far as the publicity goes, it turned out better than any one dreamed of. I'm sorry you got scared."

"You mean—that she wasn't in any danger at any time?" Murray did not understand all of this talk, but a rising sense of anger made him desirous of investigation.

"No, there was no danger. You see, we like to keep our stars' names before the public, but it's difficult with Miss Bannerman, for she's always fighting shy of making herself conspicuous."

"Then I've wasted my time to make publicity for a movie star? And you're Molly Bannerman? I knew I'd seen you before. Well, I hope you enjoyed yourself—it's been a disastrous morning for me." Murray went swiftly to get his hat and coat, fighting to keep his temper from getting the best of him.

"Oh, please, please! I didn't know it was publicity. What I told you about the gangs and my brother was true—all true. It's your fault, Woody—all your fault." She took Murray's arm and held it fast. "Please don't be angry with me—you were so good and kind, I'm so grateful—really, I am."

"Well, of course, I thought you were in danger or"—he was trying to be a good sport—"I wasted my time—well, never mind." Murray turned and walked toward the door. The girl still held his sleeve. She smiled at him wistfully, longingly.

The boy looked at her quickly. In spite of all his anger, Murray's young heart gave a great leap. After all, it had been a great adventure. And with Molly Bannerman!

"I honestly thought I needed help," the girl pleaded. "I can never tell you how relieved I was when I discovered you could read that shorthand sentence about my being in danger. You see, I was a stenographer for two years before I went into the movies."

"Tell the truth, didn't you know it was a put-up job, didn't you sort of guess I was a poor boob from the country?" Murray was still highly indignant.

"No, I didn't. I liked you. You looked so nice and clean—and—a gentleman. Please say you believe me—that we can be friends."

"Friends? What do you want of me for a friend? Just let me tell you one thing. I was on the way down-town to get a job, had an appointment for twelve, but I thought that if I could save your life or something like that, the job would go hang. Now—I've lost it."

The girl did not answer, but two big tears sprang into her eyes. The man she had called "Woody" came to stand beside her.

"Really, old man, Miss Bannerman didn't have anything to do with this. I'm sorry, but—what was that job you lost? I know a lot of business men."

"Oh, I suppose that it would have been a private secretary to somebody—a stenographer."

"And you don't want to be a stenographer? I know you don't. Do you? What do you want to be?" Molly's eyes sparkled as she questioned him.

"You're thinking that he's very good looking, and would photograph well?" Woody asked the girl.

"Yes, and he fought ever so splendidly. Have you ever been in any shows?"

"Shows—well, when I was in the navy

during the war, I was stationed at Pelham Bay—we used to have a lot of shows up there. But you don't mean that I could be a—a—"

"Yes, I do," she clapped her hands. "Can you ride a horse—all those things—can you? He's got screen personality, don't you think so, Woody?"

"Yes, a good camera face. It would make a whale of a publicity story if he joined the company. Say, I've got to run along now. Sorry you got such a scare—but it will make a good story." And then to Murray, "Glad to have met you—see you later. You'd better sign up with Miss Bannerman." And he hurried away.

Still, Murray was not overenthusiastic.

"Don't look like that, don't," the girl cried when they were alone. "Why, you break my heart when you look like that. Wouldn't you like to act with me?"

"Do you really mean it?" Murray asked slowly. "You're not fooling me?" He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. She felt the flush of color rising to her cheek, but she met his gaze steadily.

"I really mean it." And there was just a hint of a sob at the end of her sentence. "I want you to like me, and I know you'll be very clever, and earn lots of money—one hundred and fifty dollars a week right away, but—and—I want you to say that you forgive me."

Forgive her! He and Molly Bannerman stood there as if they were alone in the universe. His hands were still on her shoulders, but her eyes had looked away toward the floor, for they wished to hide the sudden start of tears. They could neither of them explain why, but it was the most perfect moment of living.

Presently, after a minute or an age, they did not know which, Molly's maid came out from the kitchen.

"Shall I serve lunch now?"

"Yes, please." Then Molly asked suddenly, joyously, "Why—why, I don't even know your name!"

"It's Murray McHugh."

"Murray McHugh! What a peach of a stage name! Woody will be tickled to death when he hears it!"

At luncheon, he told her who he was—all about himself, and she asked a thousand questions. And every few minutes they laughed—just because. Time went swiftly. The maid, a wise, middle-aged soul, kept out of their way. It was an hour for remembering.

"Why, it's three o'clock!" Molly discovered suddenly. "I have to see my dressmaker. I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll phone Woody, and we three will have dinner here, and we can talk business. Woody's the general manager of the company, you know. Then afterward we can all see a show. And if you haven't got a place to stay, Woody will put you up. He's got a bachelor apartment."

So they parted at the street door, Molly on her way to the dressmaker's, Murray McHugh left to his own devices until six o'clock. He walked five blocks trying to think it all over, and at the end of that time it seemed quite tangible, almost ordinary—that is, the adventure and the promised job did.

As he neared the subway entrance, he thought of Uncle Dan. He supposed he ought to tell his uncle why he had not put

in an appearance. He ran down the subway steps, and so to Wall Street.

It was exactly five minutes to four when he sent in his card. Uncle Dan ordered that he be admitted at once.

"Young man," he said by way of greeting, "young man, do you realize that you are exactly three hours and fifty-five minutes late for your luncheon appointment? How can you expect me to help you get a position when I know that you are not punctual—when I know—"

Murray stopped the storm that threatened to overwhelm him.

"I have a position, Uncle Dan. That's what I came to tell you. I'm sorry I was so late for lunch. You see, I met a girl, and she helped me get a job that will pay me one hundred and fifty dollars a week and—"

"A hundred and fifty dollars a week?"

"Yes, sir, and I'm in love with the girl!"

Uncle Dan was momentarily speechless. Murray twirled his hat, and muttered something about having to go.

"A hundred-and-fifty-dollar position, and in love, all in one day!" Uncle Dan shook his head. "And I thought you were slow!"



The Dark Vortex

by
H. C. Wire

OFFICIALLY announcing noontime to the Elk Hills oil camp, Mexicalli Joe, chief hunger-destroyer of the outfit, stood in front of the cook-shack banging on a loud-voiced triangle. Paus-

ing at regular intervals the Mexican would cry out in high-pitched singsong: "Chow, boys, chow!" then continue to beat on the echoing steel.

As he swung his body in time with the

clang of the triangle his beaded vest took up the rhythm and glittered like star-points of many colors. That vest, having been given to him by some captivating *señorita*, was the pride of Joe's existence. It was won, according to Joe, only after he had fought three other suitors for the caresses of his queen. He had killed them all, bare-handed; whereupon he deemed himself a man to be loved by women and feared among men.

All this was, according to Joe, done before he arrived in the Elk Hills camp. Perhaps it was true, perhaps not—at any rate he would rather have lost his hand than the beaded vest.

From the bunk-house a short distance beyond the cook-shack came a group of men laughing and joking with each other. Their clothes were black with oil, their shoes were soaked with it, as were their hats. But their faces were rough and white from having been washed in gasoline.

They were the roustabouts; drifters unskilled in the work of the oil fields; flunkies of the camp. Digging ditches, laying pipe lines, rigging up and cleaning out boilers—all the hard jobs and the dirty jobs were theirs. And occasionally that most hated job of all—going down into the choking guts of the big covered storage tanks to shovel the accumulated sand from their bottoms.

But they took it as all in the day's game; worked like devils until pay-day because they were broke, then came back on the job twelve hours after pay-day because they were broke again. And these fellows were a happy, good-natured lot. Each one greeted the cook in a friendly way before entering the mess-room.

Behind them, not included in their jesting, walked Stu Broder, alone. The hardest lines of his sullen face were drawn in a sneer, as with his hands shoved deep in his pockets he swaggered up, rolling his huge bulk from side to side as he came.

Broder had once taken a great liking to the Mexican's beaded vest and had offered to buy it. Joe had refused, probably knowing the roustabout had no money. Broder had then tried to steal it, had won the ensuing fight, but not the vest. From that

time on he had constantly bully-ragged the Mexican.

Now, passing Joe, he suddenly reached back and jerked the tail of his vest. Joe, in the middle of a downward stroke with the long iron striker, changed its course and swung at the man behind him.

With a cry of pain and rage Broder released the vest and squeezed his wrist where the rod had struck.

The cook's face was immobile, but his fingers were clinched around the iron.

"Damn fool!" he spat. "Some day you get hurt!"

Broder glared. "No damn greaser can hit me and get away with it!"

Suddenly shifting his position, he shot his fist for the Mexican's jaw. But Joe, using the iron rod as a fencer would a sword, thrust the point of it into Broder's stomach, and the man doubled like a jack-knife.

Joe stepped past him to the door of the cook-shack and paused. He said nothing, but the fire in his eyes as he glared at the roustabout should have been warning enough. Then he shuffled on to his kitchen.

It was several minutes before Broder went in to the table. He dropped upon his seat near the end and glowered about him, still rubbing the spot where he had caught the cook's thrust.

"I'll kill that greaser!" he muttered.

One of the men across the table looked up. "What the hell's the matter with you, Broder. Lay off that Mexican or else you'll go out of here carved in chunks."

"Yeh?" Broder sneered. "Let him try it!"

"All right—you're the wise guy; but take it from me, Joe has had enough of you. I'd advise you to walk backward and lock your door at night."

"To hell with you and your advice!" Broder snapped. "I wasn't born yesterday!"

The fellow across the table continued his meal. The other men ignored Broder. For a moment he sat glaring at his empty plate, then turned toward the kitchen. "Bring my grub!" he roared.

Joe appeared with a bowl of soup. In his belt was a sharp-edged meat knife

Broder burst into a growl of laughter as he saw the weapon.

"Look at the sword he's carryin'—think you're a tough one, do you? All right, you sun-baked fool, start somethin'."

Joe approached the table.

Broder waited until he was within arm's reach, then snatched at the knife. He jerked it from the belt, then leaped from his chair, howling and blinded as the bowl of hot soup crashed down on his head.

He drew the back of his sleeve across his eyes, and knife in hand, leaped out to fight. The Mexican fled toward the kitchen. Broder was upon him as he reached the swinging door and sent him crashing through it with a blow of his fist. Joe, lifted clear of the floor, fell in a heap half way across the kitchen, and before he could rise Broder leaped to him. The roustabout had dropped the knife and now clutched the back of the Mexican's vest with both hands.

By this time the men in the mess-room had jumped from their seats and one of them jerked Broder from the prostrated cook. But as Broder came away he held the torn vest in his hands.

As the men turned back to the mess-room, Joe rolled on his side and slowly rose to his knees. Then, with the swiftness of a cat he leaped toward his rack of cutlery. He grabbed a meat cleaver from its nail and swung back to Broder.

When a camp cook runs amuck with a meat cleaver in his hand there's murder in his heart. So had not the Mexican, still dazed from his fall, tripped over an up-turned chair he would have split the roustabout's head. But as he stumbled he dropped the cleaver in catching himself, and before he could recover it one of the men had pinioned his arms.

"Cut it, Joe!" the man ordered. "You two damn fools fight it out later—we want to eat now."

The Mexican stood tensely, eyes half-closed, mouth drawn tightly shut, and a look of purposeful cunning crept into his face. Then he turned from the door, replaced the cleaver and went about his work.

In the mess-room Broder gloated in his possession of the vest. The other men ate

hurriedly and departed, so he sat alone helping himself generously from the pot of stew and pans of vegetables. Occasionally he glanced toward the kitchen door and he kept the long knife within reach; but he saw nothing of Joe.

He was finishing his meal when the camp boss entered the cook-house.

"Broder," he said, "I'm not mixing in your scraps, but if you run Joe out of camp you'll go, too. I can't be hiring cooks for you to drive away."

"Aw, hell, he won't leave," Broder laughed. "Jobs are too scarce now. Anyway, we've settled our trouble. He poked me in the guts this noon, and I got even with him—that's all."

"You took his vest, didn't you?"

Broder proudly exhibited his prize.

The boss stared at it.

"You had better watch out," he said quietly.

"Don't worry," Broder scoffed. "I can take care of my own little self."

The camp boss dismissed the topic with a wave of his hand.

"What I came to tell you," he said, "is that I've got to use the rest of the gang on that pipe line job down the cañon this afternoon, so you'll have to finish cleaning out tank six alone. Most of the sand is out of her already—take up a shovel and a bucket and carry out the rest of it."

"All right," Broder grunted, and gulped the last of his coffee.

"It should take you about two hours to finish the job," the boss continued, "so you can get out of the tank by three o'clock. The new gusher has been flowing pretty steady to-day. Number five tank is about full and I've told the pumper to switch the stream into tank six at three thirty."

"I see," Broder replied. "I'll get out of it by three."

The boss left the cook-house. Broder started to follow, but stopped at the outer door and returned to pick up the vest. Stuffing the trophy under his arm he turned to leave the room, then swung back abruptly as there came a sound from behind him.

The kitchen door had opened to a crack, and closed. Broder leaped forward and

flung it wide open. Joe, with his back to the mess-room, stood washing dishes.

For a moment Broder stared into the room, then slowly backed away, came to the outer door and left the cook-house.

II.

THE boss had taken all available men to repair the blow-out on the pipe line down the valley. The camp seemed deserted as Broder passed to the tool shed for a shovel and a bucket.

Up on the hillside above camp the new gusher roared spasmodically. Some distance below it the two great storage tanks stood black against the gray desert soil. Below camp in the bottom of a narrow ravine a reservoir of water shimmered in the summer sun.

Down there was the only sign of life. On the bank of the reservoir two large steam pumps used to force the water to different parts of the camp hissed in smooth regularity, their huge pistons sliding back and forth with the precision of clock-work. Beneath the near by boilers gas fires flared and died, and flared again, automatically regulated by the steam pressure. In the shade of his pump-house dozed the pumper.

Broder went on to the tool shed, got a bucket and shovel and trudged up to the storage tank. He climbed the ladder to its top, removed the cover from the manhole and peered down into the gray depths. Hot, stifling air boiled up into his face.

"Hell hole!" he muttered, and a confirming echo from the black hollow repeated it: "Damn the job anyway!"

There was truth in his expression. For the steel tank had become a choking, blistering oven. The black oil, slopped over from some time of overflow, boiled and bubbled, cooked by the heat of the sun. And the tank was tightly covered, save for the small opening in the roof near the wall.

Constant use for storing oil from new gushers had filled its bottom with several inches of fine sand and a sticky black scum. The greater part of this had been removed, as the camp boss had said, but a small pile still remained directly beneath the manhole.

"Hell of a job!" Broder repeated as he prepared to climb down.

There was a light wooden ladder inside, left there by the men who had started the cleaning task. Broder dropped his bucket and shovel through the hole, and after taking a deep breath of pure air descended into the tank.

It was choking hot down there—like breathing over a flame. The oil-smeared sides and bottom gave off a sickening gas; a man's lungs were never made to be filled with gas, nor his head to be baked in a stinking furnace. And it was as black as night in that big hollow, with only a little light coming from the hole overhead.

Broder quickly filled his bucket with sand, then scrambled back up the ladder. The simple act of dumping the stuff over the side took much longer than the whole process of shoveling and climbing—he was in no hurry to get back into the smothering hole.

He drew himself up to the edge of the manhole and sat there gazing over the camp. There was no movement about the cook-house, not even a trace of smoke from Joe's stove. He soon saw the reason for that.

As his eyes roved up the hillside to the gusher he saw the familiar figure disappearing into the derrick house. For a moment the roustabout stared with a puzzled scowl creasing his face. That the Mexican's presence up there had something to do with himself Broder guessed. But what could he do from that place? Nothing. Damn the yellow fool—he'd better stay up there on the hill!

Determined to keep watch each time he came up with sand, Broder prepared to go back to work. From the tank next to his came a roar of gas and a swish of oil, as the gusher on the hill-side sent down one of her spasmodic flows.

A thick red gas rose from the manhole in the tank top, spumed up from the boiling oil that had been violently discharged from the hot gullet of the gusher. The stuff mushroomed up into the air for ten feet, then settled slowly, congealed into tiny sparkling drops. A slight breeze sent it across into Broder's face.

He coughed and swore aloud at the gusher. Then dropped his bucket to the sand below and followed it down the ladder. The roar of the flow into the near by tank echoed and rumbled in the dark hollow in which Broder worked. He listened intently when the noise ceased, then continued his shoveling as it started again.

With each trip out of the hole he remained a little longer in the fresh air; but the work was tiring, and each time he went down he stayed a little longer filling his bucket.

His eyes began to smart, his head ached and he grew dizzy from the heat and fumes. He started nervously each time the flow roared into the other tank. And when it stopped for several minutes he would listen to catch a sound from the pipe leading into his, wondering if the pumper were switching the flow too early. The boss had said the stream wouldn't be turned until three thirty, but Broder was taking no chances.

He worked on; climbing, shoveling, climbing again; swearing at the job, then grinning as he thought of his victory in the rumpus of noontime.

Once he suddenly ceased work and stood listening for a sound which he thought came from the steps outside the tank. Leaving the bucket down below, he quietly climbed to the manhole and peered out to the ground. There was nothing unusual. But he was certain he had heard some one. Joe? If that half-baked devil was sneaking around— Broder climbed down outside the tank.

In the oil-covered ground were tracks. Some were his own, but the oil had flowed back into the imprints. There were others, fresh ones still sharply outlined.

Broder started to walk around the base of the tank, watching intently in front of him as he went. The footprints continued ahead; but no sign of the maker. Half way around, Broder stopped, looked back, then dashed forward—and saw nothing but footprints leading around the great curve. Soon he was back to the point from which he had started.

"Hell!" he muttered. For a moment he stood thinking, then suddenly ran at top speed completely around the tank. No

man could have escaped in front of him. Satisfied, he climbed back up to the manhole.

Had he examined the footprints in the oil more closely after that first trip around the circle he might have noticed that they continued over and behind the other tank. But he didn't, and so climbed down into the dark hole telling himself that he had heard nothing. Still the thought preyed on his mind, and he worked harder that he might soon get out and away from that ungodly place.

Finally he stopped to survey his work. A few more trips would finish the job. He had removed the pile of sand and was now on the bottom. As he started to complete the task his shovel scraped noisily on the overlapping steel plates beneath the remaining dirt.

It was this noise that drowned the soft thud of footfalls slowly crossing the tank cover. Broder filled his bucket and turned to leave. Then with a cry of terror he dropped the thing and lunged toward his ladder. But his fingers closed below the bottom rung as it was jerked up through the manhole.

"Hey!" he called, "what the hell you doing? I'm down here."

A head was framed in the opening high above.

Broder shrank into the darkness as he saw it.

"Joe!" he gasped. A cold chill swept through his veins, and he felt weak—weak and helpless. "Joe," he pleaded, "give me the ladder. The oil—it 'll be turned in here soon!"

The head above remained motionless. Two eyes blinked down into the blackness of the prison.

The trapped man strove desperately to move his captor. He pleaded, he threatened, he promised.

"Listen, old boy," he said, striving to put a tone of friendliness in his voice, "I've been kinda rough on you, but that was just in play. I'm sorry I got your vest to-day, and I'll pay you for it. Honest, I got money—name your price." He waited. There was no answer. "Come, put back the ladder—I'll play square with you."

He paused, then a happy thought came to him. "Say, tell you what—I got two quarts o' *tequilla*. How's that?"

The head above moved slightly downward. "Huh? You got *tequilla*?" Joe asked eagerly.

"Sure thing—hid 'em in my bed-roll. We'll have one hell of a celebration. Come now—but down the ladder."

For a moment the Mexican's face seemed wrinkled in a smile. Then his head disappeared from the manhole. There came the scraping as of a ladder being drawn along the roof of the tank. Broder grinned. Two quarts—suppose he'd be on the job and sober, if he had two quarts lying around? Well hardly! The smile widened—dam fool greaser. Just wait until—

Suddenly Broder looked up. The light had vanished from his prison. The manhole was closed!

For an instant he was paralyzed. Then he heard the creak of the steps outside as Joe descended, and cried out wildly. Grasping the shovel he beat upon the unyielding side of the tank. The crash echoed in the black hollow. From without came a mocking tap—then silence.

Throwing down the shovel Broder dug his finger nails into the overlapping joints of the steel plates and tried to climb upward.

With the discovery that he could cling to the upper edges of the thick plates he regained some of his courage and stepped down to rest before attempting the ascent. As he waited, he became aware that the roaring in the other tank had ceased. He listened tensely for the sound to begin again—there came nothing but the creak of boards overhead as they shrank in the blazing sun and the singing of blistering steel.

On the opposite side of the tank, up near the top, a band of light showed where the ten-inch discharge pipe entered. From that direction came a low moan—just a far-off sigh—then silence. Broder, hardly breathing, strained to hear more. From out the blackness came a faint splash, then the light drip, drip, drip of falling liquid.

The thought that the gusher was being turned on again unnerved him. He groped for the wall, clutched at the edge of the

plates and started up. By straining his fingers almost to breaking, he could cling to the half-inch ledges formed by the overlapping plates. Three feet apart, up an oil-smeared wall these ledges rose, and the man in his terror thought he could climb them.

At the second joint he fell, staggered to his feet and tried again. His nails were pulled from the flesh; the blood made the plates slippery when he once more tried to climb. He sucked it from his fingers, dug them into the steel, but they were numb with pain. Again he fell, and lay writhing in the sand and scum.

He was choking from his fear and the heat. His heart was racing under the strain of terror, and his mind tortured him with pictures of a horrible death. He could see the splash of foaming oil shoot from the discharge pipe, and hear the roar of the gas. He cringed as he felt how he would strangle, choked to death in the thick gas.

He clutched his throat. What was that?

Out of the dark near the top of the tank came a sigh—gently at first, then harshly like the slow outrush of breath from a sleeping giant. Broder gasped, dug his fingers into his neck and tried not to breathe.

Came again that sigh in the darkness—louder, longer, swiftly developing into a hiss of violently exhaled breath. The man screamed—the death-cry of a trapped animal.

Then with a thunderous crash a black flow shot from the pipe above and fell roaring on the bottom of the tank.

III.

THE sun dropped behind the hills, sending out soft evening shadows that slowly engulfed the camp, the gusher and the tanks. From the cook-shack floated the merry ring of a triangle. There came a pause, then the high-pitched singsong of Mexicalli Joe: "Chow, boys, chow!" announcing the close of day.

When the men had gathered about the table and Joe had placed their food before them he hurried from the cook shack.

The thought of his revenge was not enough—he wanted to see his victim slowly

die in that seething black pit. How he would writhe in the hot oil! It would rise slowly—first to his knees, then to his waist, then to his neck. Joe grinned. He could see how Broder would then stretch his neck to keep his head out of the oil. Ah, *Sacré Dios!* He would have to make it long, very long indeed if he were to keep the oil from his mouth! He would probably scream—a gurgling scream—as the black stuff trickled past his lips, his teeth, and finally into his throat.

Joe hurried up the hill. Perhaps he was too late. Perhaps the gusher had already filled the tank. He stopped and listened. No sound came from up there. He went on toward the tank now faintly visible in the evening light.

As he came to the black wall he walked quietly, stopped and tapped the side. He put his ear close and listened. Silence. He tapped again. From the inside came a splash, followed by a muffled cry. The Mexican smiled.

The cry came again as he climbed the steps to the top of the tank.

All about the manhole was a slippery black scum that had slopped from Broder's bucket. In the dim light Joe could not see this. His feet slipped from under him and he sat down heavily on the manhole cover. He swore softly, then crawled to the edge of the manhole and slid back the wooden top.

There was nothing but blackness in the hole below. With an expectant leer on his face Joe leaned farther down trying to see the man he knew was there. At that instant there came a roar of discharged oil; a cloud of gas surged up around the Mexican's head.

Broder, in the center of the tank, cowering waist-deep in the whirlpool of oil, saw the figure in the manhole. Half-crazed though he was he recognized Joe and his hatred drove him into a frenzied rage.

Suddenly Broder ceased his cursing. He heard a terrified gasp from above, and saw the figure teetering on the brink of the manhole. He saw the Mexican fall, but catch the edge of the opening and hang suspended. Broder's hands opened and closed as if choking something. Here was his man

come to him—he was slipping, he would never get back on top!

But the Mexican, throwing the last of his strength into his arms, drew himself upward until his head was level with the tank-top. Then he kicked one leg up to catch on the edge of the manhole. His heel caught, slipped on the oil-smeared surface and his leg dropped back. For a moment his whole body swung suspended down into the gas-filled tank—then it dropped.

There was no sound of a splash as the heavy black stuff closed over the Mexican.

Broder had not moved from the center of the tank. The oil, set awlirl by the flow from the discharge pipe at one side, surged about him, but in the center it was still and he could stand on his feet. He saw the Mexican being swept around the great swirl struggling to stand up, and knew that gradually he would be driven toward the middle of the pool.

Again Broder's hands opened and closed as if crushing something, while he watched the floundering man draw near. He would wait. Soon he could reach out and clutch him as he passed. Then he would choke him, hold him—Broder stopped. He looked at the manhole, at the Mexican, then at himself.

"Joè," he called. The roar of discharging oil had ceased and now his voice rumbled strangely in the tank.

No answer came from the darkness. But Broder saw the Mexican not ten feet away. He started toward him.

"*Señor!*" The word was almost a scream of terror. "No touch me—no hurt me!" Joe shrank away. "I came to help you, to put down the ladder—but I fall."

"That's a damn lie. I know what you came back for. You wanted to watch me die. Hah! Now we both die. See? We'll strangle, or we'll drown—or we'll kill each other!"

"No—not that, *señor*, not that!"

"No," Broder agreed, "because we might get out of here if we work together. Are you going to do as I say?"

"You play some trick?" Joe's voice was tremulous with fear.

The knowledge of the Mexican's fright restored some of Broder's courage. Where

a few moments ago he had cowered on the verge of insanity he now acted with definite purpose; boastfully flaunting his superiority even in the face of death.

He walked beneath the manhole. "I'm not playing a trick—I'm going to get us out of this mess. See? Come here!"

Joe went slowly and hesitated a few feet away.

"If one of us stands on the other's shoulders," Broder explained, "we can both get up."

The Mexican regarded him suspiciously. "Who goes first?"

"I do! You *might* put the ladder down to me after you got up—and you might *not*."

"No, no!" Joe pleaded, "I go first—this gas"—he coughed—"it choke me."

Broder clutched him around the throat. "You didn't think of that when you put me down here," he snarled. "Now I go up first. See?" He tightened his grip.

Joe gasped, his knees gave beneath him and he felt limp in Broder's grasp. "All right—you go."

He spread his feet wide apart and braced himself. His clothes dripped oil, his face was covered with it; it streamed from his hair onto his shoulders, making them slippery. And although Broder dug his fingers into the Mexican's flesh he could get no hold.

"Hell! I can't climb you. I've got to make it in a jump. Now brace up!" He lunged upward. Joe crumpled beneath his weight, slipped, and they fell cursing into the oil.

Fighting the stuff from their faces they came to the surface and stood up. It was some time before they could open their eyes.

Joe was whimpering like a baby. "No can do," he moaned. "No can hold you up."

From the discharge pipe there came a sound that Broder had learned to fear. In a short time the gusher would flow again.

"Here," he said. "We've got to get out of this. I'm going to put you up first. But swear to me—you'll put the ladder down." He gripped Joe's arm.

The Mexican looked up into the bit of

sky visible through the manhole. "I swear it—may I rot in hell—see, I cross myself. I put down the ladder!"

"Then come on." Broder went to the wall of the tank and leaned against it. "Now climb!" he ordered, and steadied himself against the steel as the Mexican slowly mounted to his shoulders.

Standing upright, Joe could reach the tank-top. His groping fingers found the edge of the manhole. He clutched it, sought a firm hold and pulled himself up.

"All right?" Broder called as he saw the Mexican disappear through the opening.

There came no answer; no sound except the soft shuffling across the tank top. Then that died away. Broder called again—again silence. All his insane terror surged back. He struck barehanded against the tank, and heard nothing but the echo within his black prison.

Gently, softly as the breath of a sleeper, came the warning from the discharge pipe. Then a deep far-off rumbling set the tank a quiver.

Broder cried out madly—goaded insanely by the thought of how close he had been to freedom.

Something thudded heavily above, and a rasping sound came from the boards of the cover. Then two sticks of wood appeared in the patch of light as the ladder descended.

Broder scrambled up. As he reached the top there came a roar in the depths from which he had come, and the tank vibrated with the rush of oil.

Staggering back from the man hole he stumbled over the form of the Mexican. Alternately moaning and praying, still trembling with uncontrollable fear, lay the man who had slain three suitors barehanded—for a *señorita*, and a beaded vest.

With an expression that was half sneer, half smile Broder stared down, then unbuttoned something that had been fastened around him and held out a dripping object. It was the vest—a cheap beaded thing which had almost cost him his life.

He dropped it beside the Mexican, then with a shrug of his shoulders turned and started back to camp.



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Tries in Vain to Reduce Weight

She began to starve herself in an effort to reduce. She even gave up one meal a day and ate barely enough to satisfy her hunger. But it only weakened her without taking off a pound of flesh.

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Mrs. Vermilya had just about resigned herself to being fat and unattractive when she heard about a remarkable new discovery by a food specialist. She found out that he had discovered the simple natural law upon which the whole secret of weight control is based. He had actually discovered a way to reduce weight by eating. And she had been starving herself.

A Remarkable Reduction

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Mrs. Vermilya before she found out about the new discovery. Weight 168 pounds.



Mrs. Vermilya after she applied the new discovery to herself. Weight 128 pounds.

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"I found your instructions easy to follow and your method delightful. In 30 days I lost 28 pounds—3 pounds the very first week. My general health has been greatly benefited." (Signed) Earl A. Kettel, 225 W. 39th St., New York City.

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"I weighed 190 pounds. I reduced to 154 pounds and am still reducing. Before reducing I was always tired. Now I can walk 6 miles and feel no ill effect. My complexion has wonderfully improved also." (Signed) Miss Anna Queenan, 5570A Vernon Av., St. Louis, Mo.

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"I reduced from 175 pounds to 153 pounds (a reduction of 22 pounds) in two weeks. Before I started I was flabby, heavy and sick. Stomach trouble bothered me all the time. I feel wonderful now." Ben Naddie, 102 Fulton St., New York City.

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